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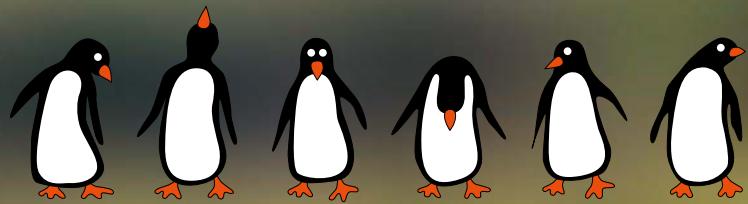
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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2015

EDITOR'S LETTER



Welcome to the latest action-packed issue of the UK's best-selling cruise magazine. In this issue not only do we have the total guide to Asia ocean and river cruises for the year ahead (page 33), but we're showcasing the best spas at sea (page 57) and the most exhilarating adventures you can have by ship (page 80).

When P&O's *Britannia* was named by HM The Queen earlier this year there was much fanfare – but what's it like to actually cruise on it? On page 72 you can read about a fairytale voyage around the Baltic on *Britannia* in the company of master chef Marco Pierre White.

Also in this issue, we have reviews from three 'cruise virgins': on page 50, first-time cruiser Chris Mosler and her husband Huw experience a romantic sailing from Venice to Istanbul; on page 66, the Ross family have their first holiday at sea; and on page 94 you can read about a cruise on a tall ship.

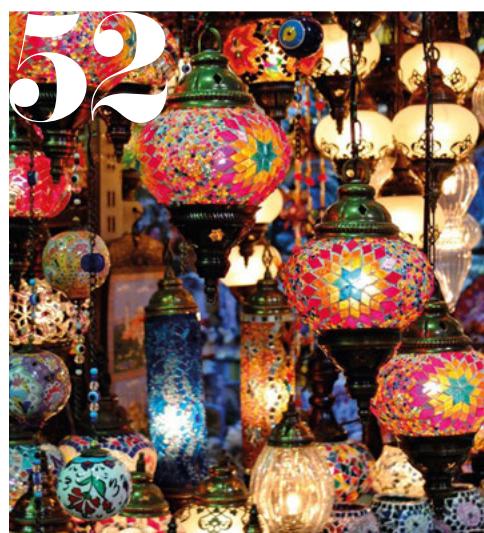
Plus *Strictly*'s gorgeous judge and cruise ship godmother Darcey Bussell shares her favourite places in the world (page 114).

And don't forget, there's still time to vote for your favourite cruise lines, agents, destinations, service providers and bloggers in the Cruise Awards 2015 – every vote counts, and you could win a holiday to Florida. Turn to page 29 for details.

Enjoy,

Liz Jarvis, Editor

liz.jarvis@cruise-international.com



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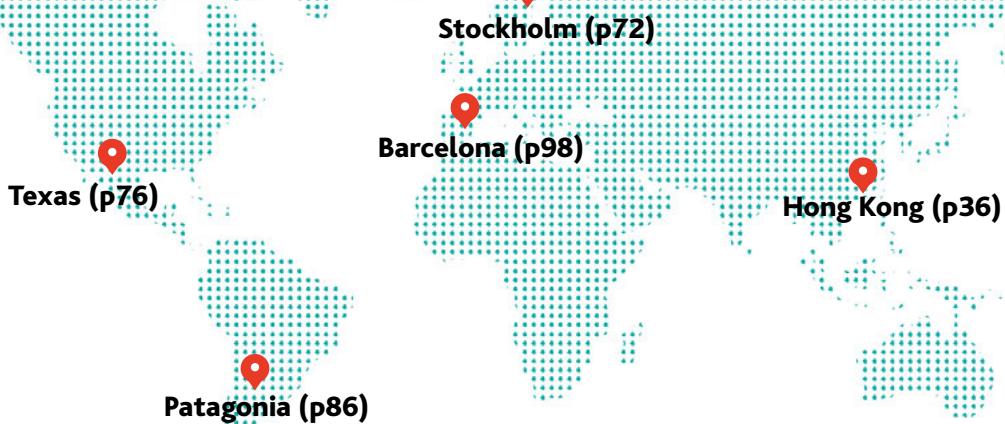
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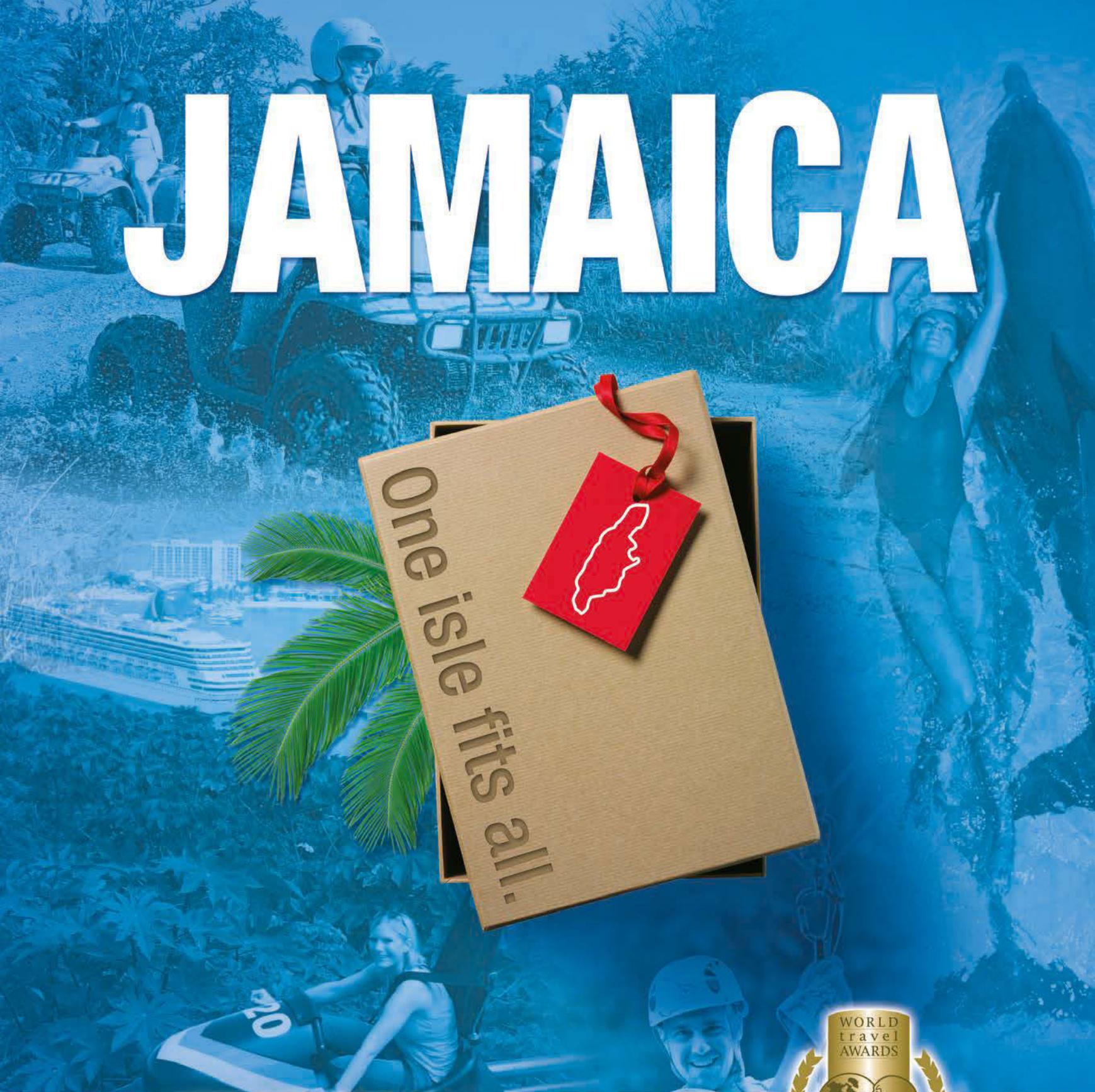
Hot spot

BURANO ISLAND, VENICE, ITALY

With its utterly enchanting painted houses, this small island located at the northern end of the Venetian lagoon makes a memorable day trip. A 40-minute ride on a vaporetto from the main island, it's noted for its lacemaking, which dates back to 1500. Legend has it that a fisherman who spurned the advances of a siren was presented with a foam wedding veil by the siren's queen as reward for his faithfulness to his fiancée. Not to be outdone, the women of Burano started to embroider lace so they too could wear a beautiful veil on their wedding day. Unsurprisingly, Burano is also known for its fish dishes, in particular *risotto de gó*, a broth made with the gó, a fish typical of the lagoon. Burano's vivid colours make it popular with artists, and Venetian lace masks are made here.

» Turn to page 66 to read about a cruise from Venice

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CRUISE *News*

SHIPS • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS

VIKING REVEALS NEW OCEAN CRUISE ITINERARIES

Viking Ocean Cruises has announced four new itineraries for 2016 and 2017 departures for *Viking Star* and sister ships *Viking Sea* and *Viking Sky*, with new ports of call including the cities of Jerusalem and Haifa in Israel, Amsterdam in the Netherlands and St Peter Port in Guernsey.

"We are encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive response *Viking Star* has generated among our guests and travel industry partners," said Torstein Hagen, Chairman of Viking Cruises. "We made a commitment to reinvent ocean cruising, and we are well on our way.

"By 2017 we will have two more ships designed to enable our



guests to better experience their destinations. We will also have four new itineraries that offer our guests more time in port and enriching, cultural experiences at a better value than our competitors."

The 2016 itineraries include *Ancient Empires & Holy Lands*, a

15-day itinerary sailing from Rome to Istanbul. Guests will have the chance to spend three days in Israel, making stops in Jerusalem and Haifa, gateways to Bethlehem and Nazareth.

For more information go to vikingcruises.co.uk.

VIRGIN UNVEILS DETAILS OF FIRST CRUISE SHIPS

Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, has announced that Virgin Cruises has selected PortMiami as the home port for its first cruise ship, setting sail in 2020, and revealed Virgin Cruises has signed a binding Letter of Intent (LOI) with Italian shipbuilding company Fincantieri for three new mid-size ships.

"The Virgin Cruises approach will appeal to cruisers and non-cruisers alike," said Mr Branson, who was joined for the announcement by Virgin Cruises' President and CEO Tom McAlpin. "We look forward to being in Miami and delivering an experience for people who want a new way to cruise."

Virgin Cruises' three new mid-size ships, which will sail from Miami on seven-day itineraries around the Caribbean, are slated for delivery in 2020, 2021 and 2022. Each ship will feature 1,430 guest cabins to host more than 2,800 guests and

there will be 1,150 crew on board. Potential customers are invited to share their ideas on what the new cruise line can do to deliver an incredible experience at sea by visiting virgincruises.com.



WIN A HOLIDAY

Voting has opened for the British Travel Awards and we're thrilled that *Cruise International* has been shortlisted once again. Everyone who votes will be entered into a prize draw to win some amazing prizes, including holidays. You can vote for us as Best Holiday Magazine at britishtravelawards.com.



NEW PAN-ASIAN RESTAURANT FOR *Seven Seas Explorer*

A new Pan-Asian speciality restaurant, Pacific Rim, will join an eclectic array of gourmet dining options on board Regent Seven Seas Cruises' new ship *Seven Seas Explorer*.

"We are setting new luxury standards across the board with *Seven Seas Explorer*, and with our sights set on building the most luxurious ship ever, we had to create an unrivalled collection of specialty restaurants for our guests," said Jason Montague, President and Chief Operating Officer for Regent Seven Seas Cruises. "The elegant Asian architectural elements found in Pacific Rim perfectly complement an exquisite menu for a gourmet dining experience that brings to life the rich culinary traditions of Asia unlike any other at sea."

Designed by leading architectural firm RTKL, the architectural and interior design for Pacific Rim takes inspirational cues from a variety of Asian cultures.

In the restaurant lobby guests will encounter a modern interpretation of a Tibetan prayer wheel that sets the mood for the visual and culinary feast to come. The large cylindrical sculpture spans from floor to ceiling with decorative panels embossed with wishes for good fortune. The prayer wheel gives way to a dramatic entry flanked by doors reminiscent of an Asian temple.

Upon entering the dining room, a rich dark colour palette dominates the scene with black mid-century metal and wood tables surrounded by banquette seating upholstered in sumptuous leather.

During dinner, guests are treated to incredible ocean views through windows designed in an abstract lotus shape, a universal Asian motif.

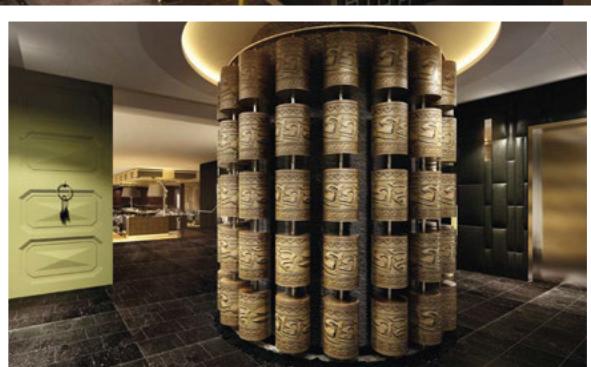
Smoky mirrors between the windows add volume to the room



by reflecting muted light throughout the space and illuminating intricate architectural details. Airy floor-to-ceiling partitions formed from a combination of traditional Japanese rain chains suspended from frames and customary Chinese screens help convey a sense of intimacy.

The design and décor artfully complements the inventive menu inspired by the diverse cuisine available throughout Asia.

The menu offers Pan-Asian creations such as a tempura encrusted crispy soft shell crab, caramelised cassia-braised pork belly topped with grilled diver scallops, seaweed and wakame salad, miso-spiced black cod wrapped in hoba leaf accompanied by pickled daikon and spicy den miso and grilled Korean



barbecue lamb chops, wok-fried beans, eryngii mushroom and gochujang dressing. Desserts will include banana and green tea cake served with coconut ice cream and matcha ganache.

Seven Seas Explorer will sail its maiden voyage 20 July 2016 and spend an inaugural season in Europe before heading to Miami for a series of Caribbean voyages. For information visit rssc.com or call 02380 682280. ►



LAST CHANCE TO VOTE IN THE CRUISE AWARDS

Voting for the Cruise Awards 2015 closes in August - make sure you cast your vote for your favourite cruise lines, destinations, service providers and bloggers at cruise-international.com/awards.





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MAJOR UPGRADES FOR AZAMARA

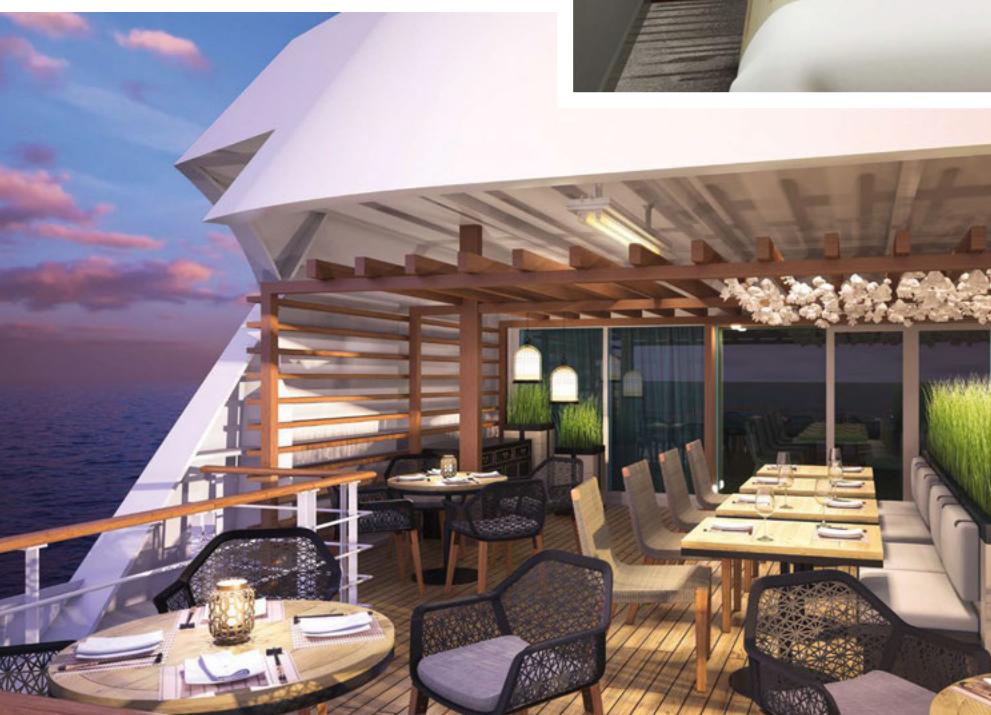
Azamara Club Cruises has announced that *Azamara Journey* and *Azamara Quest* will undergo major upgrades while in drydock this coming winter.

"As we continue to evolve our destination immersive offerings, we also want to ensure our onboard experience is modernised to meet guests' every need," said Larry Pimentel, President and CEO of Azamara Club Cruises. "We can't wait for our ships to come out of drydock as these major upgrades are going to have an instant impact on our guests' experience."

"Each corner of the ships will have a new look and feel, setting a brighter, more contemporary ambience, while the new venues will bring guests fresh experiences. We're also investing in new onboard innovations and have paid close attention to the smallest of details. We really are redefining our onboard experience in every way."

The mid-size ships that accommodate up to 686 guests will be fitted with new venues, public spaces and technology to bring redesigned spaces and fresh services to guests. The transformation will cover all staterooms and suites, dining, spa and entertainment.

Azamara Journey will enter drydock in January 2016 in the Bahamas, and *Azamara Quest* in April 2016 in Singapore (azamaroclubcruises.co.uk).



NATALIE COLE TO PERFORM ON QM2

Cunard has announced that award-winning vocalist Natalie Cole, daughter of the unforgettable Nat King Cole, will headline the first-ever Blue Note jazz-themed cruise on Queen Mary 2 on 29 October 2015.

"Cunard is very much looking forward to welcoming Natalie Cole on board Queen Mary 2," said Cunard Director Angus Struthers. "Her presence will make this transatlantic crossing really special for our guests." cunard.co.uk



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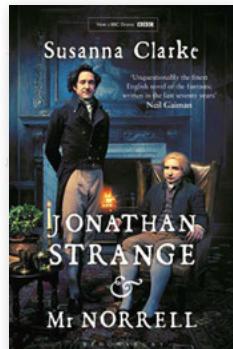


MUM'S GOING TO ICELAND

Saga has announced that three 2016 cruises will offer Women's Institute members an additional saving on sailings.

The three cruises are *Flavours of France and Spain*, departing Southampton on 22 April 2016; *Ice, Fire and Fjords*, departing Dover on 20 July 2016; and *Best of the Baltic*, departing Dover on 8 September 2016. To qualify for the WI members' discount, call the WI line on 0800 056 5355.

Holiday Reads



Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell: Susanna Clarke (Bloomsbury, £8.09)

Recently adapted into a BBC series, Susanna Clarke's novel details the rivalry of two magicians in London during the Napoleonic wars and the dark arts they bring to bear on each other.



The Lemon Grove: Helen Walsh (Headline, £7.99)

The lives of couple Jenn and Greg are disrupted when her stepdaughter arrives on holiday in Deia, Majorca with her new boyfriend, unleashing unexpected emotions in a gripping, intense summer read.

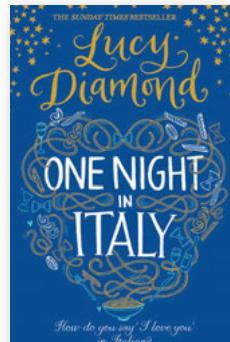


Celebrity Cruises has announced the launch of Jet Set Sail - an exclusive VIP air charter service from London Stansted's private jet terminal on selected Celebrity Equinox sailings in the summer of 2016.

For more information visit celebritycruises.co.uk/jetsetsail.

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Inspired by our Asia special? Don't forget to check with your GP whether you need any vaccinations before embarking on your cruise adventure - and if you need a doctor while you're away, consult with doctorcareanywhere.com.



One Night in Italy: Lucy Diamond (Pan Macmillan, £7.99)

When a group of disparate characters meet at an Italian language class in Sheffield, friendships form, secrets emerge and love affairs begin to blossom in this charming, funny romantic novel.



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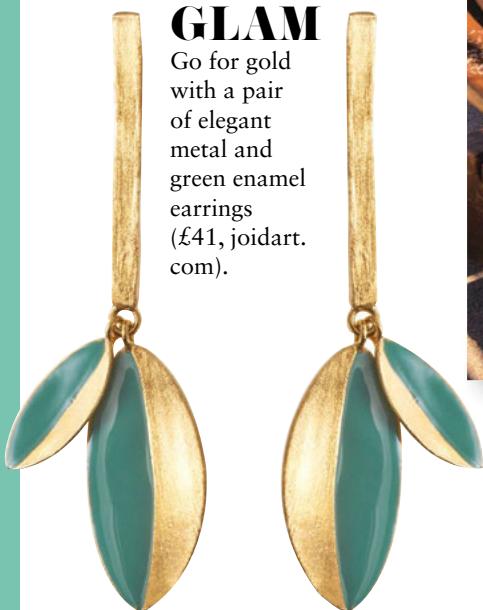


WINNING SUIT

Hit the beach or pool in this flattering geranium and white one-piece (£27, phase-eight.com).

EASY GLAM

Go for gold with a pair of elegant metal and green enamel earrings (£41, joidart.com).



Beach chic

Relax in the sunshine in a stunning Rosa Faia turquoise bikini (£79, anita.com).



PRETTY IN PINK

Practical and lightweight, this gorgeous Daisy soft cross body leather handbag is inspired by the shape of a vintage camera case (£129, peonyandmoore.com).



DECK WEAR

A pair of contrast strap chunky sandals are perfect for strolling around (£33.99, stylistpick.com).



SALSA TOPPING

Take cover in a cheerful Mexicana trilby (£14.95, joebrowns.co.uk).

TWO-TONE TOUCH

Elegant and versatile hand dipped, ombré-edged scarf (£50, jaeger.co.uk).



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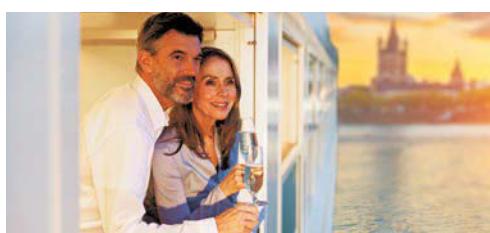
Keeping glasses topped up

To accompany lunch and dinner, you'll enjoy a carefully selected collection of red and white wines, beers and soft drinks, all of which are complimentary when you dine. What's more, coffee and tea is always free, so help yourself.



Something you wouldn't expect

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While other operators offer a French Balcony, we bring the outdoors in with our Balcony Suites. At the touch of a button, our innovative open-air system's window drops down to let the air in and unveil full panoramic views.



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Beauty NEWS

The very latest products and tips to keep you looking and feeling gorgeous on your travels



PLANT POWER

Already proving popular in the salons on board *Britannia* and *Azura*, the Evening Elixir from luxury anti-ageing brand Face Matters is a potent formula of botanical oils. Easily absorbed, it gives an instant tightening effect, while nourishing the skin at the same time. A percentage of every sale is donated to the charity Refuge (£102, available from facematters-skincare.com).



MODERN ROMANCE

Estée Lauder has brought out a new version of its popular Modern Muse fragrance. *Le Rouge Muse* is a sexy contrast of rich roses, ripe fruits and sensual Oriental notes, including Madagascar Vanilla, Vetiver, Patchouli, Magnolia Flower and Jasmine. Model Kendall Jenner is the face of the new fragrance and beauty range (available from Estée Lauder Travel Retail locations worldwide).

La dolce vita

We're crazy about the man himself, and Tom Ford's new fragrance *Fleur de Portofino* comprises notes of Mediterranean coastal flowers, honey and orange to create an evocative scent which really does remind you of the gorgeous Italian fishing village. Frankly, it's delicious – the perfect perfume to bring back from your Med cruise (available from select Tom Ford Beauty Travel Retail locations worldwide).



COMPLEXION PERFECTION

We've been waiting for a product like this to come along for a while; much more than a BB (blemish balm) or a CC (colour control) cream, La Mer's new Reparative SkinTints SPF 30 not only give great coverage and a healthy looking glow, but they also repair and nourish the skin. Available now in a spectrum of shades from La Mer Travel Retail locations across Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.



Gold fever

Michael Kors has unveiled The Gold Collection, three fragrances designed to reflect the opulence of gold, including White Luminous Gold, an intoxicating burst of pear, jasmine and amber; 24k Brilliant Gold, with notes of orange mandarin, florals and a spark of woodiness; and Rose Radiant Gold, which is more spicy, with notes of floral and soft musk. Available from Travel Retail locations worldwide.

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LUGGAGE & GADGETS



SPANISH CHIC

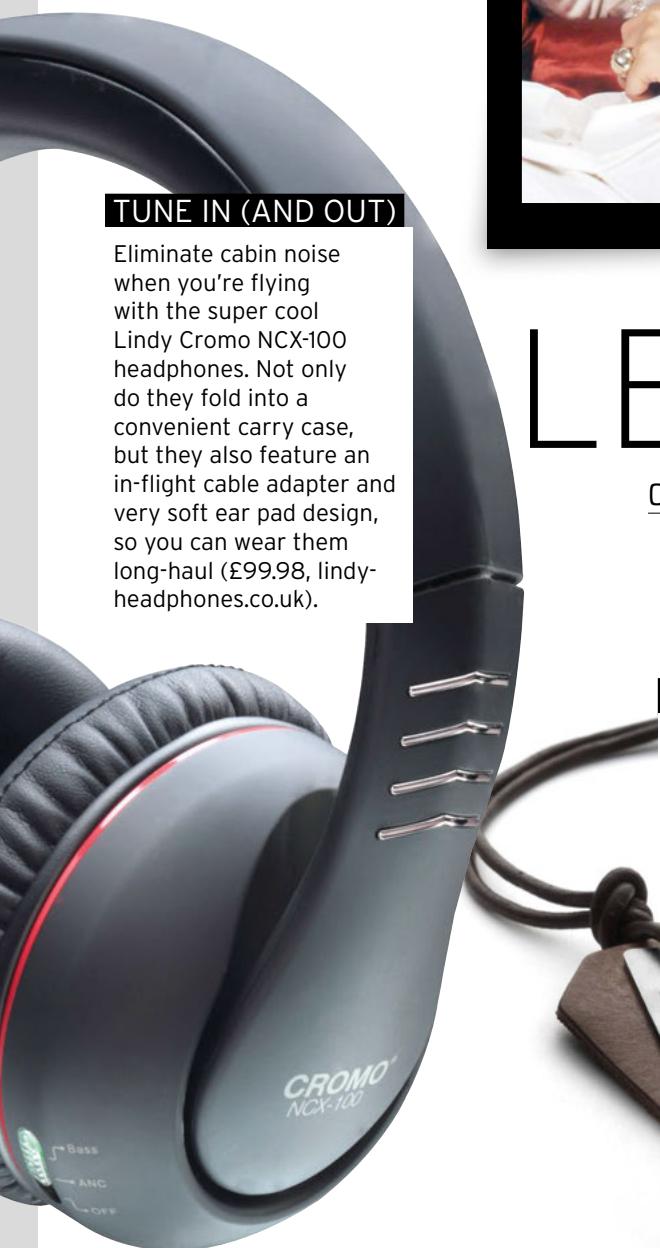
La Portegna's Benson Holdall is ideal for a day bag when you're boarding your ship (£400, laportegna.com).



SCREEN SIREN LAUREN BACALL
PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1950

TUNE IN (AND OUT)

Eliminate cabin noise when you're flying with the super cool Lindy Cromo NCX-100 headphones. Not only do they fold into a convenient carry case, but they also feature an in-flight cable adapter and very soft ear pad design, so you can wear them long-haul (£99.98, lindy-headphones.co.uk).



LET'S *go*

Our pick of the hottest
buys for your travels

DESIGNER LABEL

A gorgeous personalised luggage tag in Brazil nut leather and silver, hand stamped with the words of your choice, would make the perfect gift - or you could order one for yourself (£32, chambersandbeau.com).



TIME PIECE

Golf fans will be impressed with this Classic Tour watch from British brand Etiquis with summer white dial and stainless steel bracelet, which combines elegant design with Swiss made movements (etiquis.co.uk).

PHOTO: © GETTY IMAGES



GET YOUR PAWS ON THESE

We're barking mad (sorry) about the beautiful cherry blossom luggage range from Radley, featuring their trademark Scottie dogs - it's ultra light but roomy and fun to travel with, too (prices from £129 to £149, 0207 741 1055, radley.co.uk).

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CRUISE *Well*

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GOOD NEWS FOR CHOCOLATE LOVERS

Scientists have confirmed that chocolate is good for you. A study by the University of Aberdeen found that the top fifth of chocolate eaters were 12 per cent less likely to develop heart disease and 23 per cent less likely to suffer a stroke – and most ate milk chocolate, not dark. So next time you're on a cruise you can indulge in an oh-so-tempting chocolate dessert (like the delicious Norman Love creations served on Princess cruises, for example).



Bright smile

Sea days are the perfect opportunity to head for the spa and get a mini makeover, and teeth whitening at sea is becoming more and more popular. But how do you keep that pearly glow? Clever handheld gadget Luster Pro Light is safe, effective and tough on stains – it uses the same blue light technology that dentists use (£49.99, available from Boots stores nationwide and online).

HOT HAIR TREND

You've probably heard of balayage (it means to sweep), the French 'free form' highlighting technique. But the hottest hair trend right now is reverse balayage. "It involves placing the darker balayage inwards, closest to the back of the head, then the lights on the front hair line," says reverse balayage expert Seniz Alkan, colourist at luxury hair salon Neville. "The effect is much more natural and you get much better coverage." It also helps to lift your complexion so you look as though you've been in the sun – making it perfect for your pre-holiday beauty regime (nevilleshairandbeauty.net).

PHOTOS: ©ISTOCK



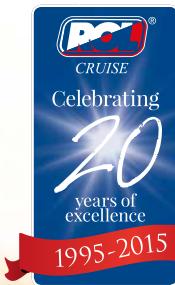
DID YOU KNOW?

Dehydration can intensify jet lag – so make sure you drink lots of water when you're flying and avoid having too much alcohol or caffeine

Street smarts



When you're travelling to regions such as Southeast Asia (see feature, page 33) street food is part of the culture – but if you want to avoid an upset stomach choose food that is freshly cooked to a high temperature and served immediately. For more travel health advice go to fitfortravel.nhs.uk.



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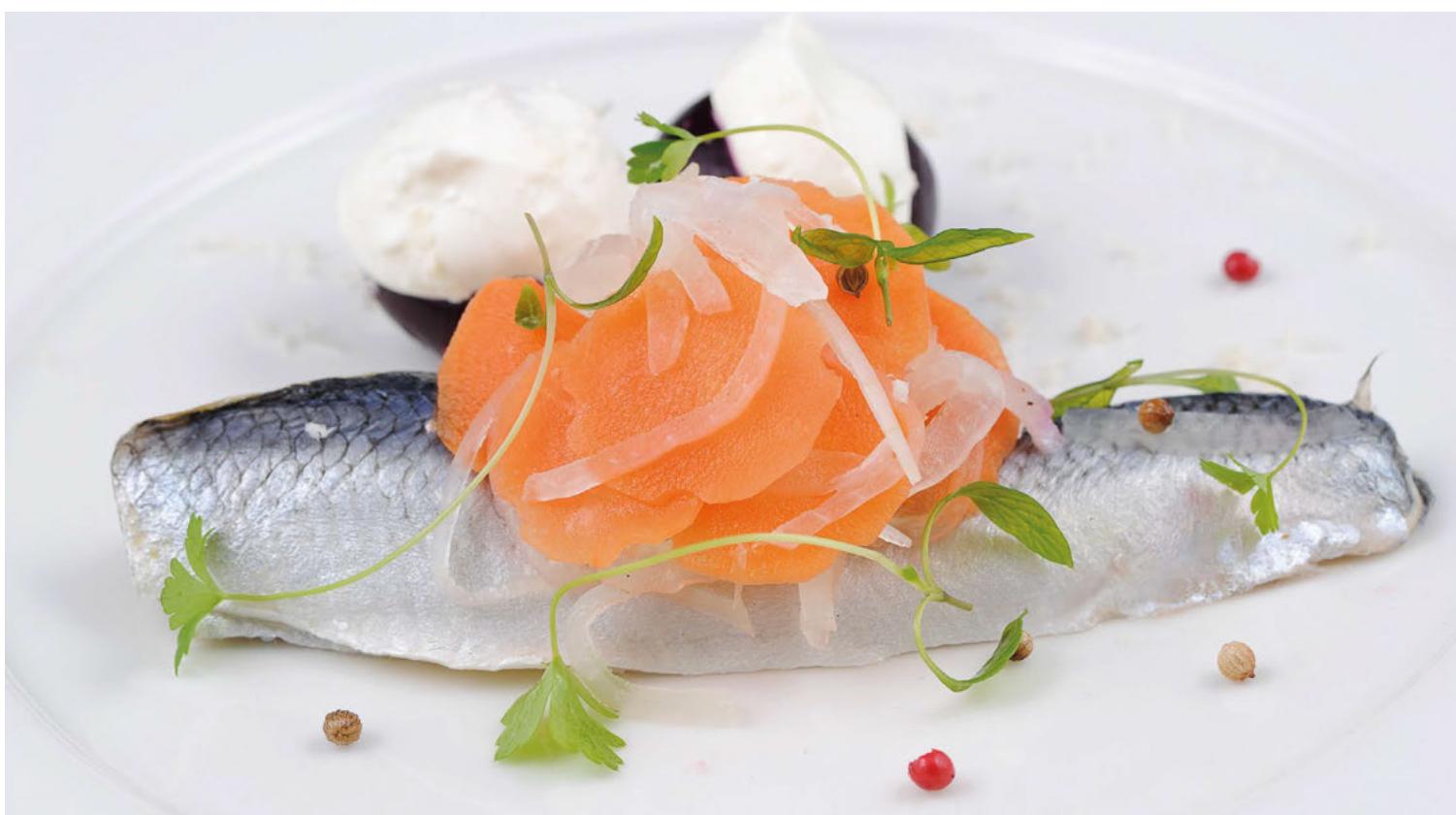
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Kitchen CLASSICS

Culinary superstar and one of the original celebrity chefs **Marco Pierre White** is a P&O food hero. Here he shares three of his favourite recipes for you to make at home



HERRINGS A LA BALTIQUE, SALAD OF BEETROOT, SOUR CREAM AND FRESH HORSERADISH

FOR THE HERRINGS

20 herring fillets,
scaled and pinned
Cold water
Salt

FOR THE PICKLING

LIQUOR
White wine vinegar
Water
Sugar
Thyme
Bay leaf

Pink peppercorns

Star anise
Mustard seeds
Carrots
Onions, finely sliced

TO FINISH

Baby beetroot,
cooked
Sour cream
Horseradish fresh
Salt
Pepper

METHOD

● Add 600ml of cold water and 100g of salt to 20 scaled and pinned herring fillets, marinate herrings for three hours then wash under cold water and dab dry with a J-cloth.

● Add to cold pickling liquor and marinate for a further two days, then vacuum-pack in single portions with two fillets and enough pickling liquor to garnish.

FOR THE PICKLING LIQUOR

● Bring the white wine vinegar, water and sugar to the boil to dissolve sugar, add all the spices and

then bring back to the boil, peel and slice the carrots then use a mandoline slicer to finely slice the onions.

● Pour liquor and spices over onions and carrots, place in fridge to cool.

TO FINISH

● Prepare herring fillets and pickling liquor and use one portion of each. Serve as per image with the addition of two cooked baby beetroot, then top with sour cream and grate over with fresh horseradish and finish off with some micro parsley. Serve with sliced new potatoes.

MACARONI OF LOBSTER WITH FRESH TARRAGON

FOR THE LOBSTER BISQUE (FOR LOBSTER SAUCE)

1 Shell from 1+1/4lb lobster	Brandy
Onion	Butter
Leek	Flour
Garlic clove	Double cream
Carrot	Salt; Pepper
Fish stock	Fish bouillon
Bay leaves	
Coriander seeds	
Star anise	
Parsley stalks	
Tomato purée	

TO FINISH

Lobster (1+1/4lb = 2 portions)
Lobster Bisque
Tarragon leaves x7
Macaroni cooked (small)
Micro cress

METHOD

- Blanch lobster for 60 seconds in boiling water then chill, prep lobster retaining the meat for service. Break shells into small pieces, place shells into a hot pan to remove any water content.
- Deglaze shells with brandy and flame. In a separate pan sweat off onion, leek, garlic, celery, carrot and tomato purée. Then add deglazed shells from pan to vegetable mixture, also add coriander seeds, star anise and parsley, add fish stock to cover everything in pan. Simmer for 40 minutes, then pass through a colander, then a muslin. Leave bisque base to settle and skim top.
- To finish sauce, make a roux with 30g of butter and 25g flour, cook out and add 600ml of bisque to roux, whisking continuously. Finish with 50ml of double cream, season with salt and pepper and a little fish bouillon.

TO FINISH

- Heat up 200ml of lobster sauce, add seven tarragon leaves cut lengthways into three and add to sauce for 60 seconds to infuse. Take 140g portion of cooked macaroni and add to sauce, heat for one minute then add portion of lobster meat (1/2 of whole lobster) and fold through until hot. Serve in a hot bowl. Garnish with micro cress.



WHEELER'S CLASSIC CHEESECAKE WITH PASSION FRUIT SAUCE

FOR THE PASSION FRUIT COULIS

Boiron passion fruit purée; Lemon juice
Icing sugar

FOR THE NEW YORK BAKED CHEESECAKE

Digestive biscuits
Unsalted butter,

METHOD

FOR THE COULIS

- Combine all ingredients together and heat until icing sugar is dissolved

FOR THE CHEESECAKE

- Make base in a 9in cake tin by mixing crushed digestives with melted butter and salt, then place in freezer. Beat eggs and add vanilla essence. Soften Philadelphia and sour cream in separate bowls. Add vanilla pods to the sugar and then add the Philadelphia, fold into the sour cream and whisk in the egg and vanilla. Take the cake tin out of the freezer, fill with the mixture and bake at 160°C degrees for 40-45 mins. Once cooked leave for 10 mins to cool at room temperature in the cake tin.

Go online: For more recipe ideas go to cruise-international.com

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In Greater ‘Fork Lauderdale’ there are over 4,000 restaurants to choose from, offering a culinary haven for every appetite, from waterfront dining, to ethnic eateries, to top notch steak houses. Spice it up ‘Floribbean’ style at chic downtown eateries, or download the ‘Fork Lauderdale’ app to find out more.

Relax and enjoy 23 miles of Blue Wave certified beaches and 300 miles of navigable inland waterways, which give Greater Fort Lauderdale the nickname ‘Venice of America’. Visitors can try something new on their next holiday – paddle board along the Intracoastal, kayak by moonlight and explore the exotic Everglades. Why not catch a show at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, or

shop till you drop at Sawgrass Mills, North America’s largest designer outlet mall.

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Asia offers an intoxicating mix of history, culture and cuisine – and the ideal way to explore this fascinating region is by ocean or river. **Deborah Stone** chooses the best cruises for the year ahead





Asia is the hot ticket for the year ahead, with 26 different lines operating 52 ships in Asian waters. There has been a steady growth of 10 per cent each year since 2013 in the number of cruises starting and finishing in Asia, according to figures from the Cruise Lines International Association. “It’s such an exciting and spectacular region of the world,” says CLIA UK and Ireland director Andy Harmer. “Cruise guests are guaranteed to return home with wonderful memories.”

Make those memories yours with our guide to the hottest Asian cruise destinations and some of the best deals around for 2015 and 2016. ►

ASIA CRUISES



Boat on the
Mekong
Delta at
Can Tho,
Vietnam



CHINA

Until recently a trip down the Yangtze was the main option if you wanted a cruise holiday in China. In the past few years, though, China has become the fastest-growing cruise market in the world. Royal Caribbean's *Quantum of the Seas* is now based in Shanghai, and *Ovation of the Seas*' home port next year will be Tianjin in northern China, which is a mix of skyscrapers and traditional architecture. From Tianjin there are also excursions to Beijing, to walk the Great Wall of China and explore The Forbidden City of the Imperial Palace or the gardens of the Summer Palace; while Sanya, known as "China's Hawaii," has sandy beaches and coral reefs if you want a break from temples. A cruise down the Yangtze won't disappoint: as well as the romantic limestone outcrops of the Three Gorges and its huge dam, there are also day trips to Xi'an to see the Terracotta Warriors.

GETTING THERE: Viking River Cruises has a 13-day *Imperial Jewels of China* cruise on *Viking Emerald* in an escorted trip and cruise on 25 August 2015, including return flights from the UK, hotel accommodation in Shanghai, Chongqing and Beijing plus a five-night cruise down the Yangtze, from £4,295pp, based on two sharing. For details go to vikingrivercruises.co.uk or call 0800 319 6660.

Royal Caribbean International has a five-night *Golden Week* cruise on *Voyager of the Seas* in a return trip from Hong Kong on 25 September 2015, calling at Xiamen, as well as Japan, from £1,124pp, based on two sharing, including flights. Visit royalcaribbean.co.uk or call 0844 493 4005.

HONG KONG

Now part of China, Hong Kong is still on many must-see lists thanks to its colonial history but also its legendary markets, the best dim sum lunches you will ever taste and back street tailors who will measure you up for hand-stitched suits or silk blouses that are ready to try on before you leave.

The funicular ride to The Peak, the top of Mount Victoria, is deservedly popular with views around the province. Jump on a Star Ferry – an experience in itself – and the vistas of Hong Kong are simply superb.

Hong Kong is highly regarded for its modern shopping centres and nightlife, but it also has its fair share of historic monuments, such as the Chuk Lam Sim (Bamboo Forest) Monastery, with three temples – one containing one of the largest golden Buddhas in the territory.

Clockwise, from top left: The sights of Beijing include the Summer Palace, and the Snack Street Market on Wangfujing Street; a junk boat in Hong Kong harbour



GETTING THERE: Cunard runs an 85-day *Southampton to Singapore* cruise on *Queen Elizabeth* on 10 January 2016 calling at Hong Kong and South Africa, Australia and Japan, from £9,999pp, based on two sharing. For details see cunard.co.uk or call 0843 374 2224.

Jetline Cruise has a 30-night *Hong Kong to Cape Town* cruise on *Queen Victoria* on 26 March 2016, calling at Hong Kong, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, from £2,799pp. See jetlinecruise.com or call 0808 115 1704.



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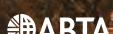


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CAMBODIA

The jewel in the crown of Mekong river cruises is the visit to the wondrous UNESCO-listed temples at Angkor Wat, the world's largest religious monument, and the ruins among the Cambodian jungle at Siem Reap.

Usually this is a hotel-based start or finish to a river cruise, which then takes you to Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh. Here you can see the Royal Palace and the Silver Pagoda, where the floor is made of silver tiles and the Buddhas are jewel-encrusted.

Ocean cruises also visit Cambodia, calling at Sihanoukville in the Gulf of Thailand for excursions to these same unmissable sights, or for snorkelling and scuba diving on the nearby white sand beaches. The coolest, driest months to travel to Cambodia are between November and March.

GETTING THERE: Saga Cruises has a 14-night *Passage Through Indochina* escorted tour and cruise, with two nights at Siem Reap, seven nights on *Mekong Navigator*, with calls including Phnom Penh and four nights in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam, departing 20 April 2016, from £2,899pp, based on two sharing, including return flights. See saga.co.uk/travel or call 0800 096 0078.

Uniworld has a 15-day *Timeless Wonders of Vietnam, Cambodia and The Mekong* escorted trip and cruise with two nights in a Ho Chi Minh City hotel, and seven nights on *River Orchid* followed by hotel stays in Siem Reap and Hanoi, Vietnam's capital, departing 13 September 2015, from £3,499pp, based on two sharing, cruise only. See uniworldrivercruises.co.uk or call 0808 168 9231.

Clockwise, from top left: Ha Long Bay, Vietnam; a baby girl peers from her mother's carrier in Lao Cai Province, Vietnam; a monk meditates at the Angkor Wat temples in Cambodia



Vietnam

Azamara Club Cruises is sailing to Hanoi for the first time this year, with an overnight stop so that passengers can explore Vietnam's capital city as well as take a trip to Ha Long Bay, the UNESCO-listed seascape of limestone islands and islets. You can sail into large caves with stalagmites and stalactites in a traditional junk, or the brave can swim or snorkel. Hanoi is known for its French colonial buildings and its memorials to the Vietnam War. These include the Cu Chi tunnels used by Viet Cong soldiers, the Reunification Palace and War Remnants Museum. Princess cruises to Vietnam and neighbouring countries also takes in Nha Trang, which

not only has white sand beaches and a harbour full of brightly painted fishing boats, but also the Cham Tower complex of temples, the Long Son Pagoda and colonial era beachfront hotels and cafés that were popular with American servicemen during the Vietnam War.

GETTING THERE: Azamara Club Cruises has a 10-night *Discovering Vietnam Voyage* on *Azamara Quest* from Hong Kong to Singapore on 2 December 2015, with overnight stops at Vietnam's Ha Long Bay, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City, from £1,848pp, cruise only, based on two sharing. See azamaroclubcruises.co.uk or call 0844 493 4016.

Scenic has a 17-day *Gems of Southeast Asia* escorted tour and cruise on *Scenic Spirit* from Bangkok to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam on 26 January 2016, visiting Chau Doc, Sa Đéc and Ho Chi Minh City, as well as Cambodia ➤





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and Thailand, from £5,995pp, cruise only, based on two sharing. For more information go to scenic.co.uk or call 0808 102 0201.

THAILAND

Ocean cruises call at Laem Chabang for excursions to Bangkok, the vibrant capital, to see the King of Siam's Grand Palace and temples such as Wat Phra Kaew, to see its Emerald Buddha, or Wat Pho, to see its Reclining Buddha. Thailand was the only Southeast Asian nation to avoid colonial rule although modern tourist invasions have left their mark, particularly in coastal resorts. Phuket is a regular cruise ship call, although some cruise lines offer day trips to the Phi Phi islands from here, while others call at Ko Samui, Thailand's third largest island, which has Buddhist temples, or wats, as well as sandy beaches. For the adventurous there is elephant trekking in the jungle and walks to waterfalls.

GETTING THERE: Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines has a 115-night *Around The World* cruise on *Black Watch* in a return trip from Southampton on 8 January 2016 calling at Singapore, Phuket and Thilawa, in Burma, as well as the Caribbean, South Sea islands, Australia, Indonesia, India, Jordan and Egypt, from £10,399pp, based on two sharing. Visit fredolsencruises.com or call 0800 0355 242.

Clockwise, from top left: Thai garden style; Busan, South Korea's second city and large port; golden Buddha statues; a tuk-tuk; Thai beach

Royal Caribbean International has a 10-night *Thailand, Cambodia & Vietnam* cruise on *Legend of the Seas* round trip from Singapore on 26 August 2015 (and 11 October 2015) calling at Ko Samui in Thailand and Laem Chabang, plus Cambodia and Vietnam, from £1,442pp, cruise only. For more information go to royalcaribbean.co.uk or call 0844 493 4005.

SOUTH KOREA

Incheon cruise terminal is an hour's drive away from Seoul, South Korea's capital. Like so many Asian cities Seoul is a mix of ancient and cutting-edge modern. UNESCO-listed Changdeokgung dates back to 1405 and was a royal palace, while the increasingly popular demilitarised zone outside Seoul is the no man's land between North and South Korea. Busan, the second city, saw vicious fighting during the Korean War of the 1950s, and a United Nations cemetery has the graves of soldiers from 16 nations that were involved in the conflict. It also has several temples, including Haedong Yonggungsa. Busan also has sandy beaches nearby, such as Songjeong and Haeundae beaches.

GETTING THERE: Royal Caribbean International has a four-night *Best Of Jeju* cruise on *Mariner of the Seas* in a return trip from Beijing, China, on 19 August 2015, calling at Jeju island in South Korea, from £970pp, based on



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JAPAN

Kobe is one of Japan's most important fly-cruise departure ports and the gateway to the ancient imperial capital of Kyoto, where you can visit the Golden Temple dating back to 1397 and the Zen rock garden of the Ryoan-ji temple. Round-Japan cruises will take you to Aomori to experience the natural hot springs and snowcapped mountains in the distance and to Hakodate, the first Japanese city fully opened to Westerners in the 1850s. The cobblestone streets of its Motomachi district still have Western-style houses. Okinawa is a group of islands in the south that has seen the restoration of its ancient monuments, such as Shuri Castle and Shikina-en Royal Garden. It is also known for a Second World War naval battle and now has a Peace Park in remembrance of both Japanese and American soldiers. Yokohama is the nearest port to Tokyo, where the Imperial Palace Plaza is at the centre of the city and the Sankei-en Gardens are full of historic buildings from all over Japan. Smaller ships may also visit Shimizu port, which is just 22 miles from Mount Fuji, with the Fuji-Hakone-Izu national park providing great views of the mountains, as well as hot springs and hiking.

GETTING THERE: Royal Caribbean has a five-night *Xiamen & Okinawa* cruise on *Voyager of the Seas* in a return trip from Hong Kong on 5 October 2015 calling at Okinawa, from £1,084pp, based on two sharing. For more information see royalcaribbean.co.uk or call 0844 493 4005.

Princess Cruises has a nine-day *Hokkaido* cruise on *Diamond Princess* in a return trip from Yokohama on 19 August 2015 (and June, July, August, September 2016) calling at Kushiro, Otaru, Hakodate and Aomori, Japan, from £679pp, cruise only. See princess.com or call 0843 374 4444.



SINGAPORE

Royal Caribbean's *Mariner of the Seas* will be based in Singapore this winter for the third year running, an indication of how important this island city state is to the cruise industry. Once known as the British colony founded by Stamford Raffles in 1819, it has a modern identity all of its own as a successful financial centre. The man-made supertrees of its Gardens By The Bay, which collect rain water and generate solar power, are technically stunning as well as being visually beautiful. And there are plenty of real plants in the huge complex, which includes the Cloud Forest and Flower Dome. Clarke Quay is a colourful riverside development of restaurants, bars and boutique shops while Marina Bay Sands Skypark is the latest Singapore landmark, on top of three 55-storey towers. The views are very impressive and there is an

infinity pool, plus spas, gardens and restaurants.

GETTING THERE: Voyages To Antiquity has a 21-day *Burma & The Malay Peninsula* cruise on *Aegean Odyssey* from Columbo, Sri Lanka on 5 February 2016 with two nights in Singapore, as well as calls in India, Burma and Malaysia, from £4,395pp, based on two sharing, including flights and hotel accommodation. See voyagestoantiquity.com or call 0845 437 9737

Princess Cruises has a nine-day *Malaysia and Thailand Grand Adventure* cruise on *Sapphire Princess* in a return trip from Singapore on 13 March 2016 with a day in Singapore mid-cruise and calls at Malaysia and Thailand, from £624pp, cruise only, based on two sharing. Visit Princess.com/go or call 0843 374 2401. ➤

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INDIA

Ocean cruises that stop in India will probably call at Mumbai, formerly Bombay, where the Victoria Railway Terminus is almost an exact replica of London's St Pancras Station and the Gateway Of India marks the 1911 visit of King George V and Queen Mary. But Mumbai is a modern city with a distinctly spicy flavour, such as the exotic Chor Bazaar full of antiques – real or not. Some cultural cruise companies offer land-based escorted tours to the so-called Golden Triangle to see Delhi's Red Fort, the Taj Mahal in Agra and Jaipur's City Palace, among other exceptional sights. Others start with a land-based ►



tour from Delhi, then switch to a week's cruise down the Ganges from Kolkata, formerly Calcutta, India's second largest city. Uniworld's new river ship *Ganges Voyager II* launches in February 2016 and will be on the Ganges, taking passengers from the former capital of the British Raj to visit Mother Teresa's former home and the Victoria Memorial Hall museum, which has India's largest collection of colonial artefacts.

GETTING THERE: Oceania Cruises has a 20-day *Far East Jewels* cruise on *Insignia* from Dubai in the Middle East to Singapore on 20 September 2015 with calls in India, Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand, from £3,089pp, based on two sharing. Free air fare may be available. See oceaniacruises.com or call 0845 505 1920.

Uniworld has a 14-day *India's Golden Triangle and the Sacred Ganges* cruise on *Ganges Voyager II* in an escorted trip and cruise from Delhi to Kolkata on 10 March 2016, including hotel stays during visits to Delhi, Agra and Jaipur, plus seven days on the Ganges in a return trip to Kolkata, from £5,449pp, based on two sharing. See titantravel.co.uk or call 0800 988 5823.

BURMA

Still relatively new to international tourism, Burma – or Myanmar as it is now known – is a treasure of golden temples, colonial buildings and unspoilt

natural beauty. River cruising down the Irrawaddy, Kipling's 'Road To Mandalay' will take you to Bagan, where the 3,000 ancient temples and monuments rival Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Cruises generally operate between Bagan and Mandalay, where the Mahamuni Pagoda showcases a gold leaf Buddha. The world's longest teak bridge – the U Bein Bridge – is just outside the city in Amarapura. Land-based stays in Yangon, formerly Rangoon, are usually included in river cruise packages, but it is also an easy excursion for ocean cruise ships that stop at Thilawa, about an hour's drive away. The main attraction here is Shwedagon Pagoda, a 2,500-year-old shrine covered in gold and studded with diamonds. It is the most important of hundreds of temples and stupas (shrines) within the complex.

GETTING THERE: Viking River Cruises has a 15-day *Myanmar Explorer* on *Viking Mandalay* return escorted trip to Bangkok on 3 September 2015 and regular dates until 24 December, with hotel accommodation in Yangon and Inle Lake in Burma before joining the ship at Mandalay and visiting Amarapura, Bagan and other villages in Burma from £5,099pp, based on two sharing, including international flights, internal flights and 13 guided tours. For details see vikingrivercruises.co.uk or call 0800 319 6660.

Belmond has a 12-day *Gorges of The Far North* on *Belmond Road To* ►►

Clockwise from right:
The Ganges at Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh; Thiksey Monastery, Ladakh, India; the Great Wall of China; the Taj Mahal, India; a temple in Bagan, Burma, now known as Myanmar



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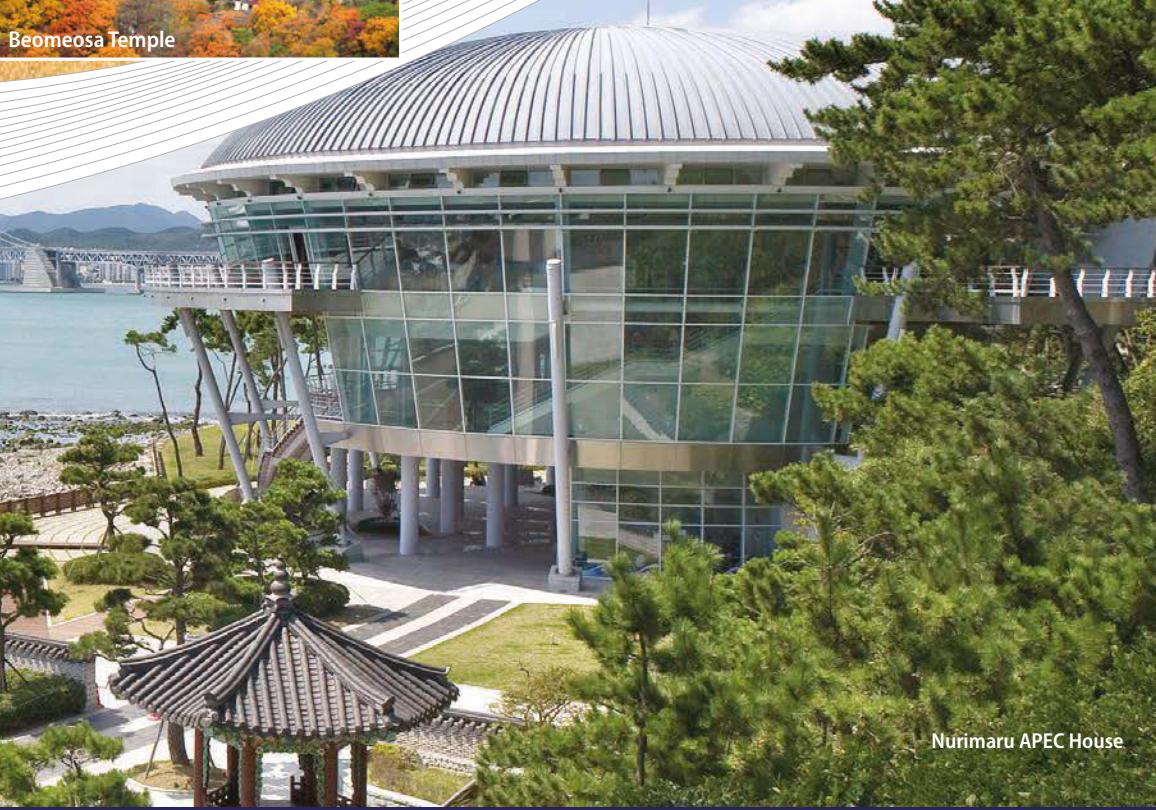


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Mandalay from Bhamo to Bagan on 25 August 2015, visiting Mandalay and several off-the-beaten-track villages from £2,620pp, based on two sharing, cruise only. See Belmond.com or call 0845 077 2222.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a melting pot of cultures: Malays, Chinese and southern Indian, with a dash of Portuguese, Dutch and a touch of British colonialism. West Malaysia is at the bottom of the Malay Peninsula, bordered by Thailand and Burma, while over the South China Sea is east Malaysia in Borneo. It is a country of idyllic beaches and coral reefs, pristine rainforest and mountains, traditional communities living in wooden stilt houses and cities made of steel and glass. The island of Penang is a popular cruise destination, offering sandy beaches. Malacca, on the peninsula, was a successful trading post and colonial outpost, as testified by its UNESCO-listed Portuguese fort and church, and its Dutch Square. Bintulu is in east Malaysia and excursions there include visits to nearby Taman Tumbina, which has an orchid garden, butterfly house, lots of flamingos and a zoo. You can go on jungle hikes here.

GETTING THERE: Oceania Cruises has a 20-day *Imperial Exploration* cruise on Nautica from Hong Kong to Bangkok on 24 January 2016 calling at Kota Kinabalu and Kuching in Borneo from £3,299pp, based on two sharing, including flights and hotel accommodation. See oceaniacruises.com or call 0845 505 1920.

Voyages To Antiquity has a 41-day *Grand South Africa & Southeast Asia* cruise on Aegean Odyssey from Cape Town to Singapore on 16 January 2016 calling at Penang and Malacca, as well as ports in South Africa, The Seychelles, Sri Lanka, India and Burma, from £6,795pp, based on two sharing, including flights and hotel accommodation. See voyagestoantiquity.com or call 0845 437 9737. 

Clockwise from right:
Thean Hou Chinese Temple, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; a tea plantation in the Cameron Highlands, Malaysia



PHOTOS: © GAVIN HELLIER/AVL IMAGES, ALAN COPSON/AVL IMAGES

Go online: To read more reviews including a cruise along the Mekong to Vietnam and Cambodia visit cruise-international.com



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JUST THE two of us



For their first holiday as a couple in 17 years
Chris Mosler and her husband Huw set sail on
an Eastern Med cruise – and came back new



I'm walking through the narrow, winding streets of Mykonos, and the bright pink bougainvillea against the white walls and blue-shuttered windows of shops and houses looks too perfect to be real. Each corner brings a new delight: a taverna with gingham tablecloths, an olive tree shading an inviting courtyard or an art gallery offering a cool retreat.

From the top of the hill the whole town is laid out before me, gleaming brightest white against the bluest sea; out in the bay the ship we have been calling home for the last week is at anchor. Not for the first time on this adventure I feel like I am on a film set. I can't help myself and I burst into a medley of songs from *Mamma Mia*. It's a good job none of my teenage children are with me.

Mykonos was our last port of call after a week at sea on Princess Cruises' *Island Princess*. When my husband, Huw, and I boarded in Venice we were slightly nervous cruise virgins; by day six we were cruise ►



Clockwise, from above: Island Princess at sea; the best way to scoot round the narrow streets of Mykonos; an array of colourful lanterns in a shop in the Grand Bazaar, Istanbul

converts who were contemplating barricading ourselves in our stateroom and refusing to leave.

We have never had a 'holiday' together as such, always choosing to self cater with our four children. I am also used to being the organiser, so I think it took me about five minutes to sink into the delights of being looked after. Our well-appointed stateroom had been carefully prepared by Maurius, who was also on his first cruise and almost as excited as we were. The enormous bed with Egyptian cotton linen looked very inviting, as did the chocolate strawberries and Champagne.

Unpacking and hanging our clothes in the generous hanging space made me pause for thought – I wouldn't be packing it all up again until we reached Greece.

A Martini in Crooner's Bar, overlooking the astonishing three storey Atrium with its glass lifts and sparkle, followed by a trip across to Venice by water taxi, and I began to feel like an extra in a Bond film. The sights and sounds of Venice on an early summer evening were intoxicating; gondoliers plying their trade, Piazza San Marco (St Mark's

Square) buzzing with life, the sound of violins drifting on the air and all around me the sheer beauty of the city. We ate dinner in 300-year-old Ristorante Antico Martini and watched elegant Venetians spilling out of a performance of *Madame Butterfly* at Teatro La Fenice next door. As we strolled back to catch our water taxi to the ship I could feel all the cares of our working lives drifting away.

The next morning saw us sitting on our balcony eating fresh croissants and sipping tea, contemplating a trip to Venice in the rain. Many of our fellow passengers were zooming off on organised tours to visit the Murano Glass Factory or to take a gondola ride to the Doge's Palace in the Piazza San Marco but we opted to spend the morning just meandering.

A rainy Venice was still breathtakingly beautiful and we dipped our toes into the busyness of St Marks' and the Rialto Bridge before diving into the back streets and strolling along the small canals, eating pizza by the slice and taking shelter inside ancient churches. We were fascinated by the hubbub of daily life on the waterways. Ambulance, police and fireboats whizzed by, rubbish

boats with onboard cranes ensured that the streets and canals remained relatively litter free, postal workers delivered the mail by boat and, of course, the gondoliers were cheerfully ferrying passengers around.

Back on board we snatched a quick game of table tennis before heading to the topmost deck of *Island Princess* for a glass of Champagne and enjoy the departure. Seeing Venice from 15 decks up was awe-inspiring; hundreds of years of history laid out before us as we sailed down the Grand Canal.

Afternoon tea served by white-gloved waiters in the Bordeaux Restaurant was next on our itinerary followed by a pre-dinner walk and a proper explore of the ship. At least, that was the plan; instead we found the Promenade Deck with its beautiful teak floor, stunning sea view and enticing loungers. It seemed rude not to sit on them awhile and watch the world go by.

I was slightly apprehensive about our two sea days; neither of us is very good at relaxing and I had visions of us twitching a bit and getting restless, but cruise life has a pretty instant effect and the sight of a pod of dolphins playing right outside our



Clockwise, from above: The vivid colours of a bougainvillea contrast with the white of the buildings on Mykonos; Chris standing by one of the island's churches; and a back street Venetian style

window was another highlight. We had no problem at all lying on the superbly comfortable loungers in the peaceful adults-only Sanctuary, sipping glasses of cucumber water, enjoying afternoon tea and reading our books. A swim followed by a trip to the Lotus Spa for a facial and a massage and I hardly recognised myself as we dressed up for the one formal night of our trip. I'd moved from Bond extra to Bond girl and I rather liked it. If I'd had time to pop to the onboard casino as well then the transformation would have been complete.

Our behind the scenes tour of the kitchens the following morning was always going to be a hit but we were incredibly lucky that Commendatore Alfredo Marzi, master chef for the whole Princess fleet, was on board and decided to conduct our tour himself. As we descended the escalators to the kitchens he told me that everything is cooked from scratch, that almost everything is cooked to order and that, if necessary, they have enough food on board to last for two weeks without restocking. I can certainly vouch for the freshness and flavour of all the dishes we ate while we were there and I was pleased to see that local

specialities appeared on the menu at each of our stopover destinations. Whether we ate in the self-service Horizon Buffet, one of the two main restaurants or chose to eat at one of the speciality restaurants (cover charges apply) I was delighted to find that, as vegetarians, we were really well catered for. On our last evening Signor Marzi even cooked us a speciality dish off-menu and presented it to us with a flourish.

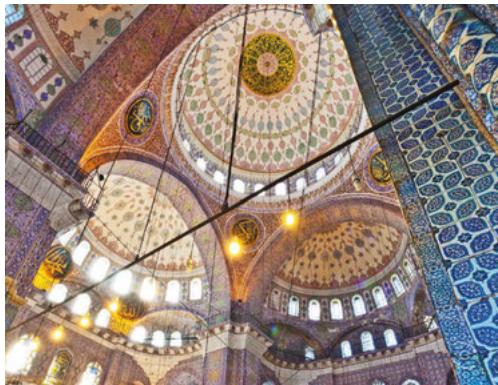
I DID NOT REALISE THE PLEASURE TO BE HAD FROM WAKING UP SOMEWHERE NEW WITHOUT DOING THE WORK TO GET THERE

Throwing back our curtains to see the minarets of Istanbul gliding past our balcony on day five had me digging Huw out of bed like an overexcited child. This was one of cruising's biggest surprises for me. I hadn't realised how much pleasure I would get from going to sleep in one place and waking up somewhere entirely new without me having to do anything to get us there. It was terrific.

We booked an organised tour to explore Istanbul and I was really glad

that we did. Our guide taught us so much about the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia and it was far easier jumping into an air-conditioned bus to take us from the dockside to the old city rather than trying to find our own way. The exterior of the 17th-century Blue Mosque was impressive with its beautiful domes and towering minarets, but the interior was something else. Its name comes from the glow caused by 20,000

blue Iznik tiles in 33 shades dotted throughout. It was beautiful. I was even more impressed with the Hagia Sophia, which really brought out the historian in me. Now a museum, this magnificent Byzantine church was converted to a mosque by the Ottomans in 1453 and its Christian images were plastered over and hidden. The plaster is being gradually removed to reveal the well-preserved images underneath. The mixture of Islamic and Christian art was



Clockwise, from above: The wondrous interior of the Blue Mosque, Istanbul; formal night for Chris and Huw; a cobalt shutter on a Mykonos house; the Aegean

fascinating and I could have spent hours exploring.

A carpet-making demonstration was followed by free time to wander through the Grand Bazaar, the largest covered market in the world. This was, for me, the highlight of the cruise. We worked our way slowly through its incredible maze of winding streets packed with 4,000 shops and cafes, all brimming with life. The sounds, sights and smells were a feast for our senses. We explored the captivating tiny shops full of brightly coloured lanterns,

straight from the West End. It was astonishingly good and an excellent way to round off a wonderful day.

Our final day was perfect. As we sailed into Mykonos and dropped anchor in the bay, I felt the remaining shreds of tension leave my shoulders. Whisked ashore in local boats for lunch in a taverna on the seafront of this beautiful island ensured that my conversion to cruising was complete. Huw and I explored the back streets of Mykonos town with its pretty windmills and white and blue buildings; we paddled in the sea hand in hand and realised that we had slowed right down and that we were smiling a lot.

Reflecting on our six days on board *Island Princess* I realised that all my previous assumptions about cruising had been disproved. I loved the freedom we had to design our own itinerary and to pick and choose from the myriad of activities listed in the *Princess Patter* newsletter, which was delivered to our stateroom each evening. Being able to choose when and where we ate with the 'Anytime Dining' option meant we were free to enjoy all the fantastic dishes available on board and being able to opt in or out of organised tours allowed us to explore each stop-off at our own pace. It really is a fabulous way to discover new places.

THE SOUNDS, SIGHTS AND SMELLS OF THE GRAND BAZAAR IN ISTANBUL WERE A FEAST FOR OUR SENSES

shelves piled high with aromatic teas and spices and discovered the old book market with its shady square.

We could have opted for *Movies Under the Stars* that evening on the huge screen on the top deck, tucked under blankets and nibbling on popcorn but decided instead to take in a show at the onboard Princess Theatre. We were astounded to see the most incredible first showing of *On the Bayou*. The sets, costumes and cast could have been transported there

Our last evening was spent playing paddle ball on Centre Court, with the amazing backdrop of Mykonos behind us, followed by dinner in the Bayou Café and the Love Boat Pool Party.

We sneaked away, cocktails in hand to gaze at Mykonos disappearing behind us, vowing to return. We had rediscovered ourselves and, just as Princess Cruises had promised, we were returning home 'new'.

GETTING THERE

Princess Cruises offers a 12-night cruise on *Island Princess* from Venice to Barcelona, with ports of call including Istanbul, Mykonos, Athens, Naples and Toulon from £949pp, based on two adults sharing an inside stateroom, cruise only. Price includes accommodation, all meals and on board entertainment. For more info or to book visit princess.com/discover or call 0843 374 2403.

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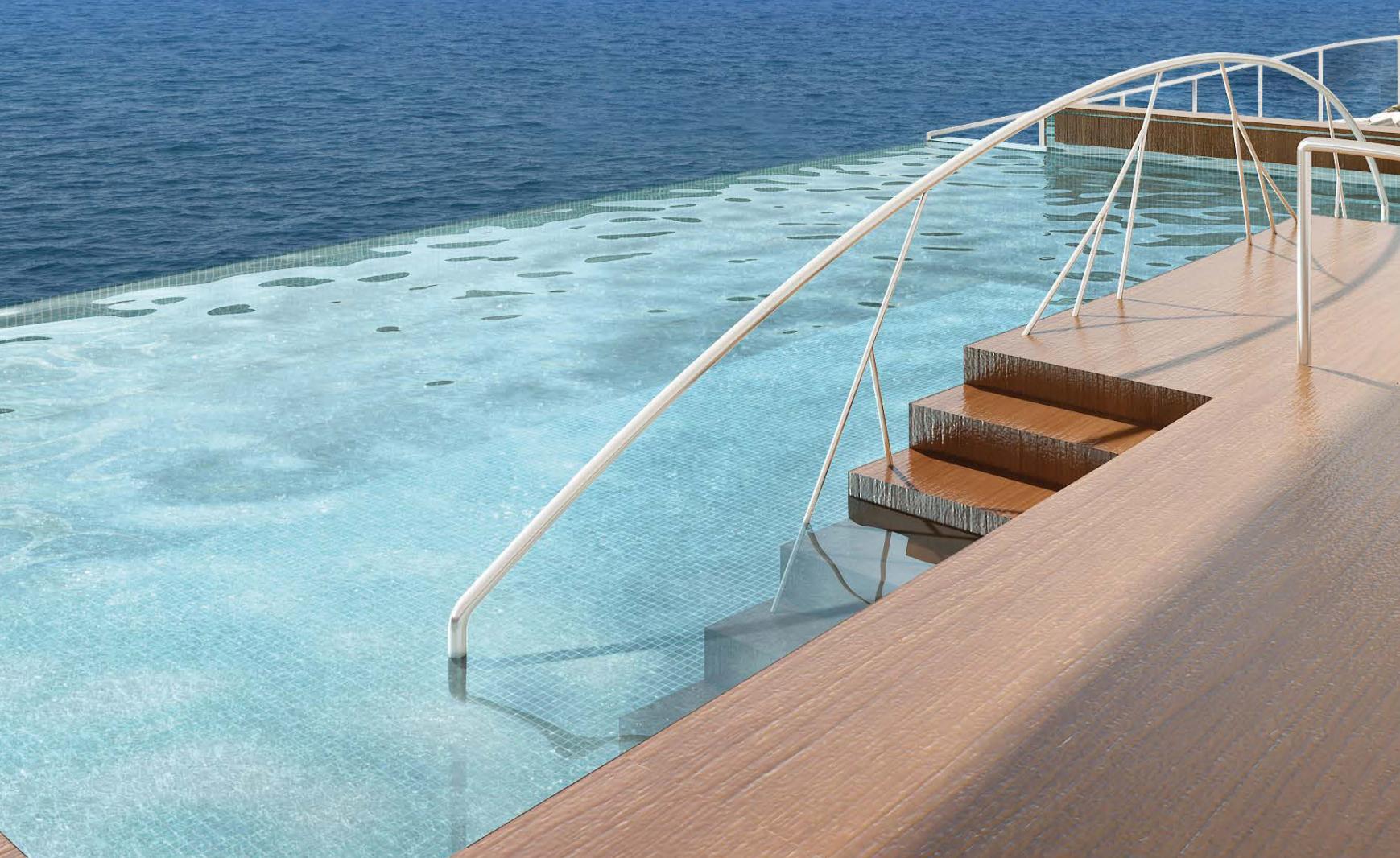
TOP 10 Spas at sea

Sea days are the perfect excuse to indulge in a luxurious treatment or chill-out session in the ship's spa – and these cruise lines all offer a blissful experience

REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES

Regent Seven Seas Cruises' ships feature beautiful Canyon Ranch SpaClub spas, with each ship offering a 'thermal environment' with an aromatic steam room infused with pure plant essences, plus a Finnish sauna. The idyllic spa on board new ship *Seven Seas Explorer* will offer a selection of luxurious treatments specially developed in partnership with luxury wellness and beauty experts Red Flower.

MUST-TRY TREATMENT: The Gemstone Anti-Ageing Facial is a luxurious treatment made unique with the addition of gemstones and precious minerals. This rejuvenating, nourishing treatment includes a firming pearl enzyme exfoliating mask and a Kashmir perfecting mask combined massage using rose quartz and amethyst wands. Pure luxury (rssc.com).





ROYAL CARIBBEAN

All Royal Caribbean ships have the very popular Vitality Spa on board. Although the spas vary slightly, the treatments offered are generally the same, using Elemis and La Thérapie, with specific ranges for gentlemen and even teenagers. The ambience is understated and calm, with friendly therapists and a good choice of face and body treatments, including acupuncture and even tooth whitening.

Signature treatments include the Elemis Exotic Lime and Ginger Salt Glow, where warm oils are applied before lime and ginger exfoliating salt is used to exfoliate and rejuvenate the whole body. The ritual finishes with an application of deliciously scented Exotic Island Flower Body Lotion.

MUST-TRY TREATMENT: The Elemis Pro-Collagen Marine Facial is a fabulously indulgent facial promising to slow down the signs of ageing and reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles. The treatment also includes a luxurious hand, arm and scalp massage and the results are both effective and seriously relaxing (royalcaribbean.co.uk). ►



OCEANIA CRUISES

Oceania Cruises is another cruise line boasting Canyon Ranch SpaClubs across its fleet, offering treatments alongside a fitness centre, a private spa terrace with either a thalassotherapy pool or whirlpool tubs, plus sauna, steam room and beauty salon. The signature 'Your Transformation' facial is an exclusive and very high-tech treatment, with products especially designed to strengthen the skin and take action against DNA damage caused by the sun. This restorative facial stimulates healthy cell production and helps to defend against signs of ageing.

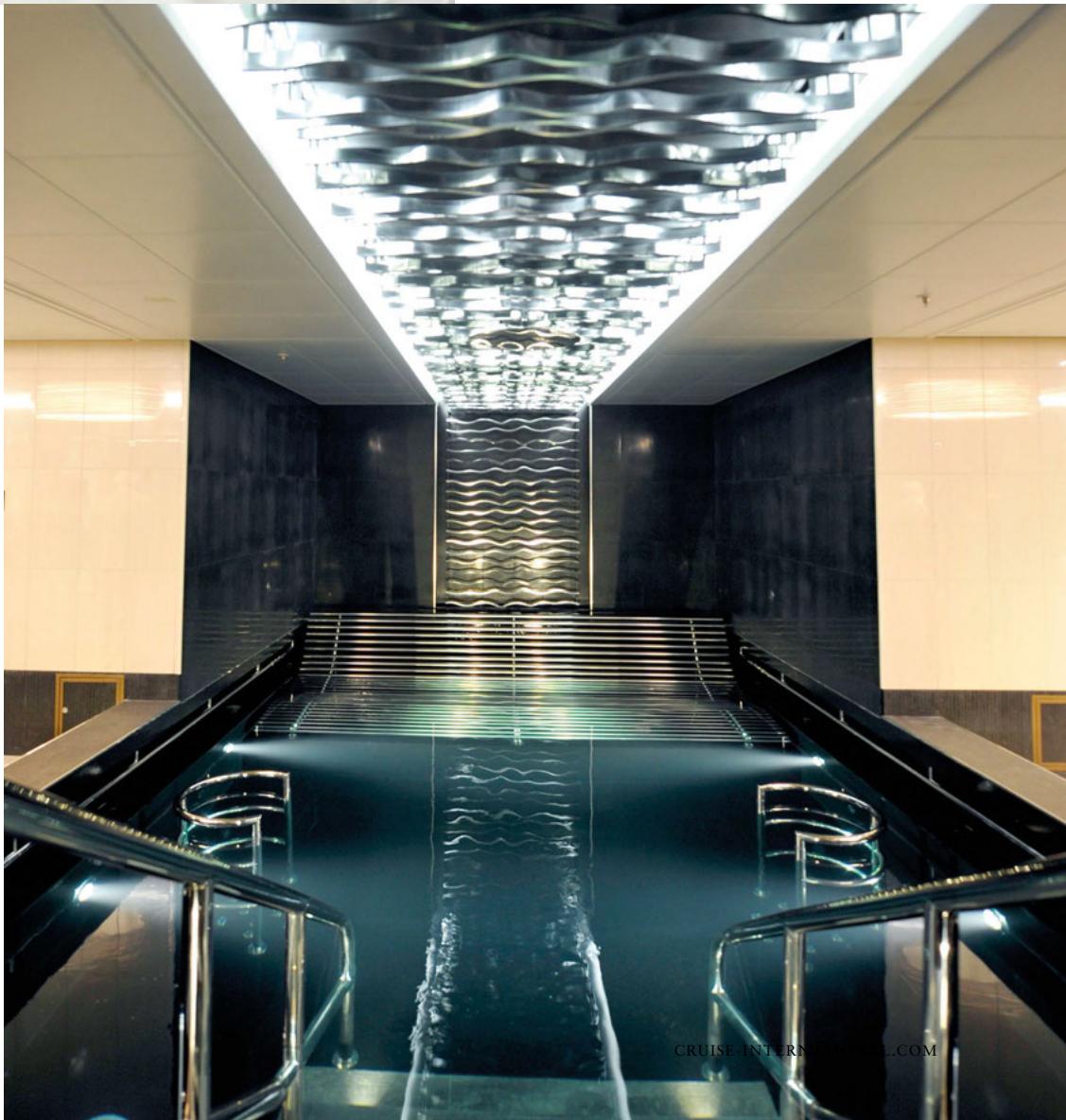
MUST-TRY TREATMENT: The restorative Ocean Scrub includes a dry brushing treatment with organic Dead Sea salts, plus soothing applications of biodynamic honey and Red Flower Ocean essential oils, leaving the skin soft and supple (oceaniacruises.com).

P&O CRUISES

P&O Cruises' Oasis Spa and Health Clubs feature across the fleet. Flagship *Britannia*'s opulent new spa, rich in dark wood, marble and soft, tropical colours offers treatments using Elemis and La Thérapie products.

Signature treatments include new Elemis Biotec Facials, featuring a combination of advanced technology including micro-current, light therapy, O2 infusion and ultrasonic peeling. There's a good choice of treatments for men, plus a blow out (blow dry) menu and hydrotherapy suite.

MUST-TRY TREATMENT: For sheer indulgence with a marine twist, the Elemis Aroma Spa Seaweed Massage; a deliciously scented warm seaweed and essential oil mask is gently applied to the whole body before you are completely wrapped from head to toe, then experience an incredible feeling of weightlessness in a sensory dry flotation bed, leaving you feeling utterly relaxed and pampered (pocruiises.com).





PRINCESS CRUISES

Each ship in the Princess fleet has a Lotus Spa offering a range of treatments. Some ships offer other services such as acupuncture, Botox, fillers and tooth whitening and the adults-only Enclave at Lotus Spa, a premier thermal suite exclusive to *Royal Princess* and *Regal Princess*, has a real city spa feel with a hydrotherapy pool, cascading shower, laconicum, caldarium and hammam. Signature treatments include the La Thérapie HydraLift Facial and the ultra-indulgent Aroma Stone Therapy performed using heated volcanic stones and warmed aromatic oils.

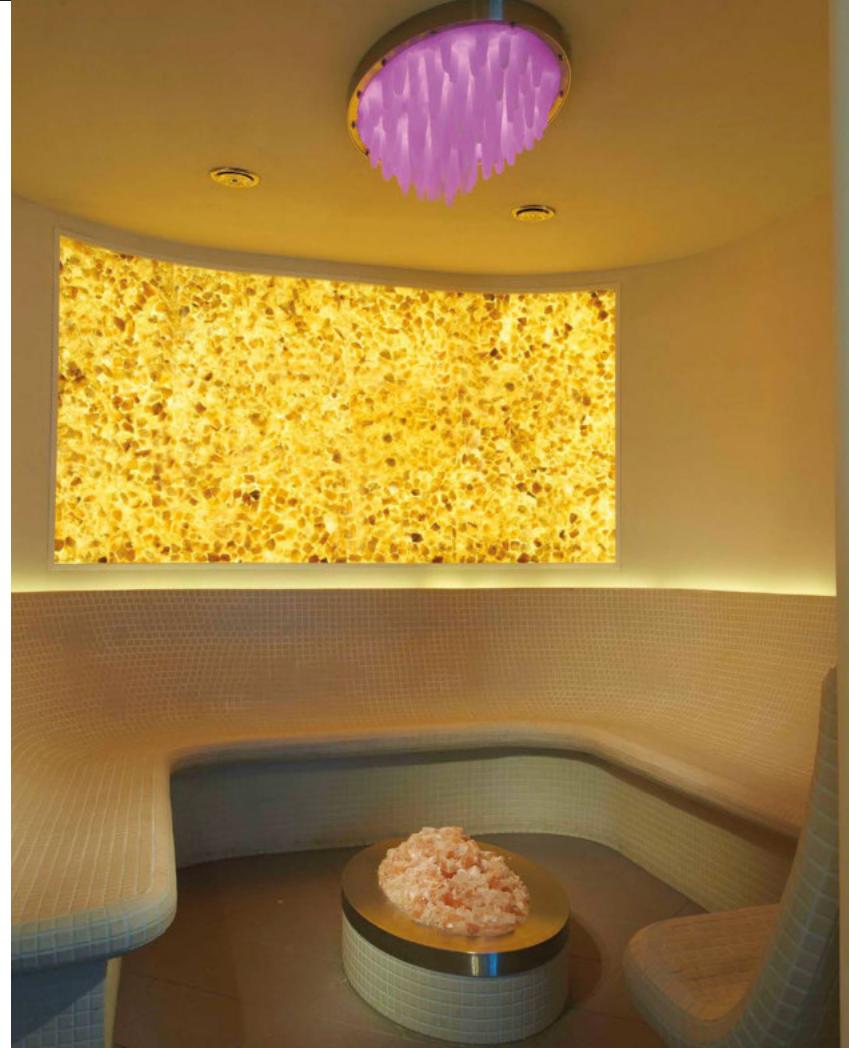
MUST-TRY TREATMENT: The Scrub and Shine Bar in the Enclave at Lotus Spa has a personalised service where guests work with a spa mixologist to create a bespoke salt or sugar scrub specifically tailored to their own skin type, leaving the skin soft and heavenly scented.

NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE

The Mandara Spa is in service on every Norwegian ship, each offering a hydrotherapy courtyard, with sauna, steam room, therapeutic salt room, Jacuzzis and therapy pool, plus an arresting view from the front of the ship. The spa has a hair salon, fitness centre, gorgeous treatment rooms and friendly therapists offering a range of Elemis treatments.

The Mandara Spa signature treatment is the Mandara Four Hands Massage – the ultimate indulgent treatment with two therapists performing a synchronised massage.

MUST-TRY TREATMENT: The Oxy-Derm Microdermabrasion Facial – an anti-ageing treatment that manages to be both effective and pampering. The facial uses state-of-the-art technology, mixing microdermabrasion and oxygen therapy with pampering Elemis products, all in one luxurious treatment (ncl.co.uk). 

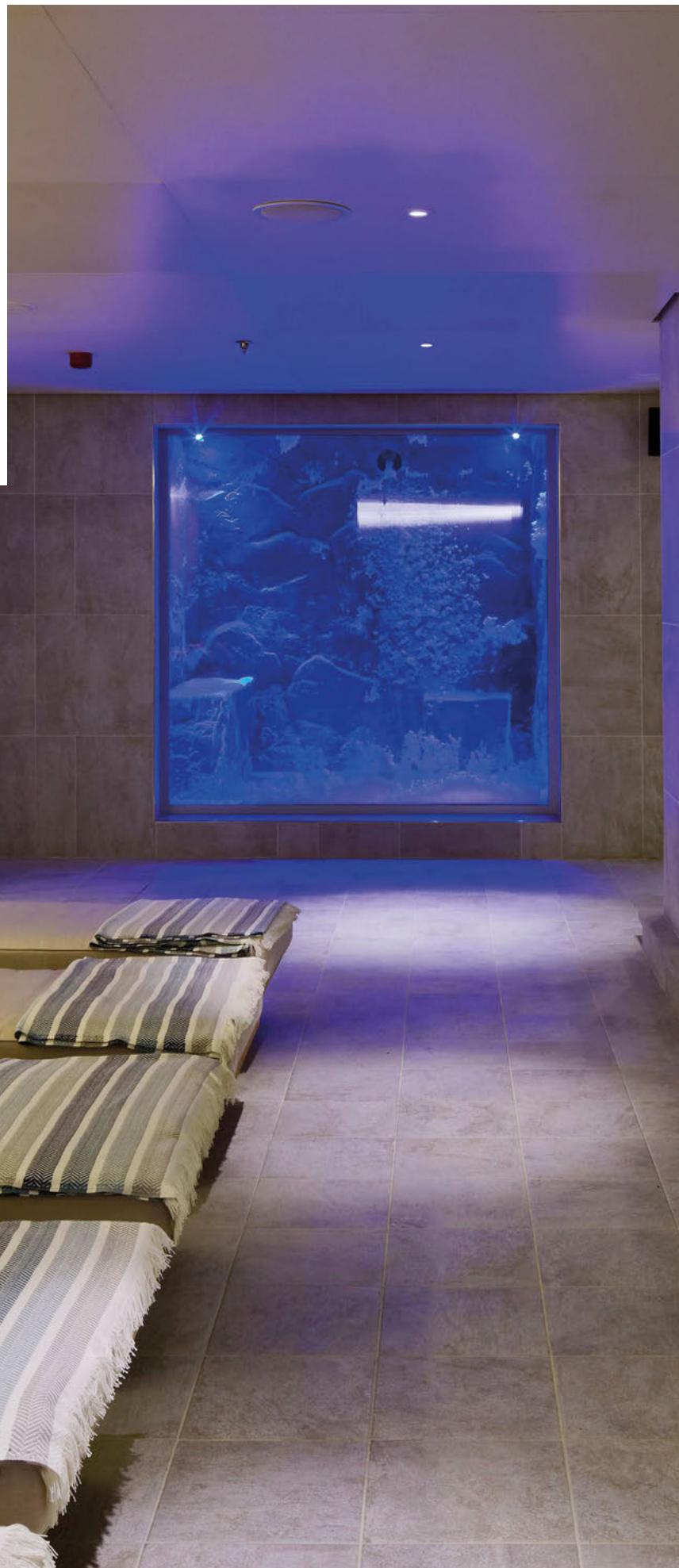


VIKING OCEAN CRUISES

The LivNordic spa on board Viking Star is themed around ancient Nordic culture and decorated with traditional materials including Swedish limestone, black slate and recycled glass. Reflecting the Nordic tradition of hot and cold bathing experiences, the spa includes a snow grotto where snowflakes magically flutter from the ceiling through chilled air and environmentally friendly saunas.

Signature Swedish massage therapies include a choice of mindful (gentle), detox or deep tissue massages using traditional Swedish massage techniques.

MUST-TRY TREATMENT: The invigorating Nordic Bathing Experience, which can be enjoyed before or after any treatment or fitness session. Sessions begin with relaxation in the traditional Nordic sauna, followed by a bracing dip into the cold pool, then a welcome return to the sauna. Next is a session in the refreshing snow room. The revitalising cycle can be repeated as many times as necessary – snow boots optional (vikingcruises.co.uk/oceans).





CELEBRITY CRUISES

Celebrity have teamed up with the US destination health resort chain Canyon Ranch to provide their passengers with Canyon Ranch SpaClub across 10 of the ships in the fleet. The SpaClubs all have a unique Persian Garden with a range of aqua-therapy experiences.

The signature Canyon Ranch massage is an indulgent 50 or 80 minute full body massage using specific Canyon Ranch massage techniques to stimulate circulation, dissolve tension and soothe muscles.

MUST-TRY TREATMENT: The comforting Ayurvedic body wraps are tailor-made to suit your body type and designed to nourish, hydrate, tone and revitalise. The soothing cucumber and aloe wrap is especially good for skin that has had a little too much sun exposure – plus it smells delicious (celebritycruises.com). 



MSC CRUISES

MSC won Best for Wellbeing at the Cruise Awards 2014 and its exotic Balinese-inspired spas are an absolute haven at sea. They feature authentic treatments carried out in a serene atmosphere, with floor-to-ceiling windows in each treatment room giving wonderful ocean views. There is also a vitamin juice bar in each spa so you can enjoy a revitalising and healthy non-alcoholic cocktail before or after your treatment.

The spa menu includes a range of massages using aromatic oils and a mixture of Oriental techniques, some including reflexology and hot lava stones.

MUST-TRY TREATMENT: The Himalayan Dream massage with exfoliating fossil salts from the Himalayas. The ionising salts gently exfoliate and soften the skin, leaving it prepped for the blissful massage with a heady mixture of warm aromatic oils. Trust us, you'll leave walking on air (msccruises.co.uk).



CUNARD

Guests on board *Queen Victoria* and *Queen Elizabeth* can indulge at the Royal Spa, relaxing at the Royal Bath House, which includes a thermal suite, hydrotherapy pool and relaxation areas. The Royal Spa offers Elemis treatments for men and women, as well as couples treatments, a range of wellness experiences using traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic techniques and a diverse range of fitness classes.

The Royal Spa's signature range of body rituals, Aromasoul, offer multi-sensory massages and ritual scrubs using exotic oils and techniques inspired by ancient cultures.

On board *Queen Mary 2*, the luxurious Canyon Ranch SpaClub is the largest spa afloat, spanning two decks and with 24 treatment rooms.

MUST-TRY TREATMENT: The Detoxifying Ritual in the Canyon Ranch spa on board *Queen Mary 2* is a relaxing body treatment based on a traditional hammam bathhouse experience, using Moroccan mint tea, quince and orange blossoms and essences of cardamom, jasmine, bergamot, amber and clove. This heavenly scented ritual concludes with a full body massage (cunard.co.uk). 



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"WE WANT TO GO AGAIN"

The **Ross family** embark on their first cruise on MSC Divina – and are delighted with their holiday at sea

Are these the same steps as in the Queen's palace?" asks our daughter Liberty in awe as we climb the Swarovski-crystal staircase up to the Yacht Club on *MSC Divina*. As our butler guides us into an oasis of elegance, I start to wonder the same thing.

Tying in with the school holidays, the Mediterranean voyage on *MSC Divina* was perfect for us – round-trip from Rome, with ports of call including Cannes, Naples and Barcelona, and a day at sea. What also appealed was the idea of knowing that all our food and entertainment, including kids' clubs, would be included – a definite bonus.

From the moment they saw the ship, the children – five-year-old Liberty and Miles, seven, were enchanted; we were impressed by its elegance and glamour. Inspired by Sophia Loren, godmother to all MSC ships, *MSC Divina*'s décor is distinctly Italian: bold and luxurious. Our suite was part of the 'Yacht Club', MSC's 'ship within a ship'. There are just 69 Yacht Club staterooms, with 24-hour butler service and room service, as well as a private restaurant, lounge and pool area.

Our suite was sumptuous, with large mirrors to effectively create a sense of space, clean lines with real dark wood, and decor in warm, decadent colours. The bed had a super comfy memory foam mattress and a sofa converted into a double sleeping space for the children. The soft furnishings included luxurious Mascioni Egyptian cotton bed linen and a pillow menu with five options – heavenly at the end of a long day exploring. With the most amazing blackout curtains, it was the first time since having children that we had slept until 10am.

The marble bathroom had a bath and powerful shower, a perfect sanctuary to both refresh and relax. There was a dressing area with plenty of drawer space, as well as full-length hanging space – ideal for the attire

needed for *MSC Divina*'s formal and 'Meet the Captain' evenings. There was also a dressing table with large mirror, spot lighting, drawer-mounted hair-dryer, mini-bar stocked up twice a day, a safe, flat-screen TV set and, to our son's delight, a Nintendo Wii.

A private balcony accessed through a sliding door was the ideal place to enjoy our morning coffee as we entered each new port (and we were relieved to find that the children wouldn't be able to open the door lock on their own). We lounged in super soft cotton robes and slippers, reading our newspapers. We even saw a pod of dolphins. A perfect moment; we were enchanted watching them whirl and jump in and out of the waves. This really was the antidote to our hectic lives back home.

There were three main private eating areas in the Yacht Club. We often ate snacks at the panoramic Top Sail Lounge, which had the most amazing picture windows with breathtaking sea views that helped create a calming atmosphere.

Daily breakfast within the One Pool Complex provided simple, good food; cereals, yogurts, fresh fruit, hot breakfasts and a full array of drinks. The experience was quiet and relaxed and very civilised.

Each evening we dined in Le Muse, *MSC Divina*'s fine-dining restaurant. The service throughout was impeccable, the food refined and drinks plentiful; the fish menu comes highly recommended. Le Muse was child friendly and accommodating of fussiness. The daily menu included pasta, chicken and fries, if required.

There were numerous other eateries on the *MSC Divina*, such as the Eataly Steakhouse, Ristorante Italia and Galaxy Restaurant, allowing you to simply pop in for a snack or enjoy a sit down meal. However we



were so enamoured with the Yacht Club, we mostly ate there for dinner. There were also temptations available in other venues throughout the ship such as ice creams and delicious pastries.

A cruise really is the perfect holiday for children. Our daughter was enchanted on meeting Doremi, the MSC mascot, and she simply had to acquire a cuddly version from the MSC logo shop on the last night. I also acquired a bottle of perfume from La Profumeria – a necessity, I told my husband.

There are activities and entertainments galore for children on *MSC Divina*. Mini Club for age 3-6 and Juniors Club for age 7-11. For older children there was a play centre, 4-D cinema, video games room, bowling sports bar, F1 simulator, as well as a fabulous water slide.

We were particularly impressed at the breadth of the activities, with the programme in the kids' clubs running from 9am until 11pm. Fantastic fun was had as the ➤



FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HAVING CHILDREN WE SLEPT IN UNTIL 10AM. THEY IN TURN LOVED THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING AT SEA, WHOOPING AND WHISTLING WHENEVER THE SHIP BLEW ITS HORN

children made their own pizzas and learnt high-energy dance moves, providing ample time for us to relax and unwind.

The children loved the experience of being at sea – both whooped and whistled when the ship blew its horn. Liberty was absolutely enchanted with the mascot Doremi, while Miles was fascinated by the ship. His end-

of-holiday treat was buying a model of the ship so that he could count all the lifeboats. Both children were also impressed by the chocolates left on our pillows every night.

A highlight for our family was our evening visits to the Pantheon Theatre. The shows were marvellous, and included Italian Singers, a Michael Jackson tribute, as well as dance

and acrobatic shows. We were absolutely wowed by the talent. The theatre was ideal for all ages and varied entertainment was put on throughout the ship, with live music in most lounges and bars.

As members of the Yacht Club we had direct lift access to the MSC Aurea Spa – a tranquil and relaxing space with complimentary unlimited access to the thermal area – sauna, steam room and relaxation room.

There were numerous treatment rooms, offering massages and other body-pampering treatments at an additional cost. I had a Balinese massage. It was the most soothing massage I have ever had. And for my husband, the gymnasium was large and ➤



Clockwise from above: Silver service on board MSC Divina; fun on the quayside; exploring Palma in style



had a variety of cardiovascular machines and strengthening equipment, which he used several times during the week, always managing to secure a piece of equipment. There were also various exercise classes including pilates, cycling and stretching classes, at an additional cost, as well as a jogging track and football pitch.

Of course, a big part of cruising is leaving the ship and exploring. We were delighted to discover that *MSC Divina* offered a variety of excursions from every port and I was amazed at how well organised and easy these were.

We also did some exploring of our own and most things of interest only ever seemed a 10-minute walk away.

Our highlights included paddling on Cannes and Barcelona beaches and discovering the delights of Palma around the cobbled streets on a horse drawn carriage. In Naples we hopped on and off the city sightseeing bus, taking time out to indulge in real Italian gelato and, naturally, it being in the home of pizza, a Neapolitan margherita simply had to be sampled. Unsurprisingly, it was absolutely delicious.

Since we arrived home Miles has been asking: "Why haven't we got a butler?" and "Why can't we go to the theatre every night?" He's not the only one. Luxurious, relaxing, and a fantastically easy way for us to visit idyllic Mediterranean destinations on one holiday, our first cruise was simply amazing. We had the most incredible week and are now complete cruise converts. We can't wait to experience one again. 

GETTING THERE

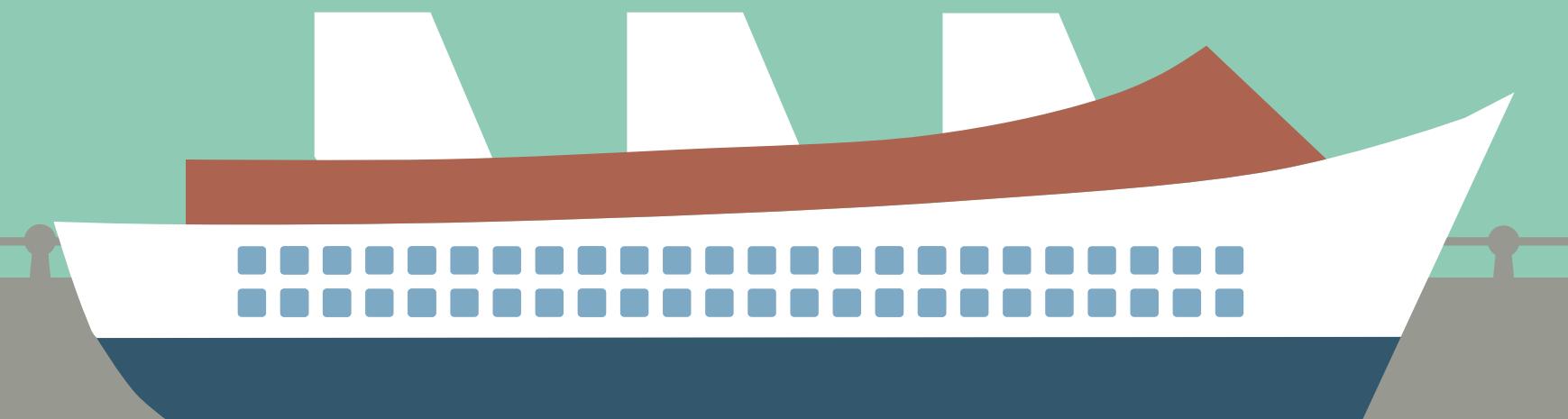
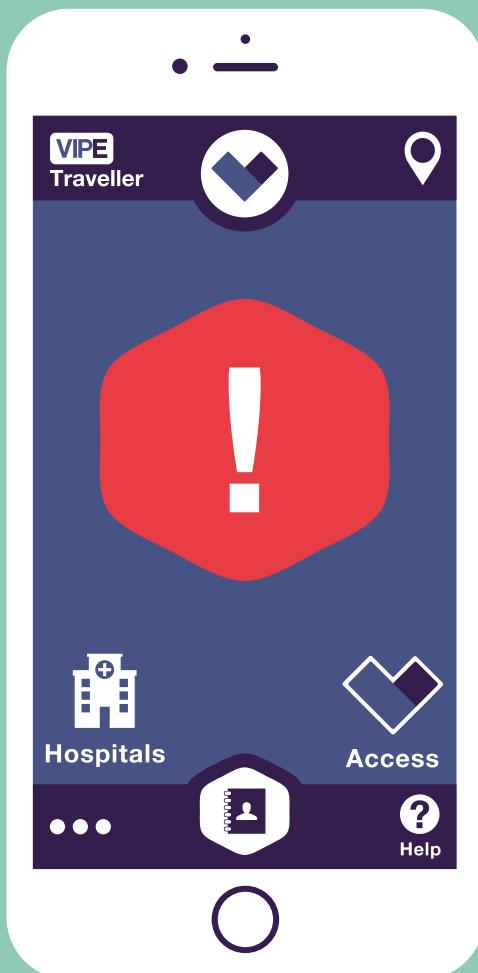
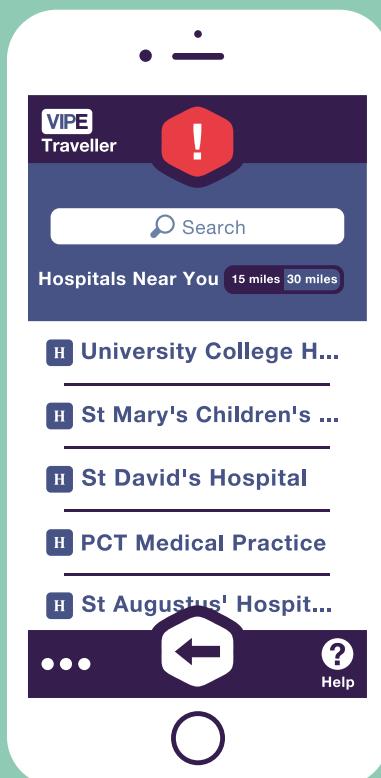
A seven-night cruise on *MSC Preziosa* departing 17 October round-trip from Genoa and calling at Civitavecchia (Rome), Palermo, Cagliari, Palma, Valencia and Marseille starts from £2,396 for a family of four (two children under 12) sharing a balcony stateroom, including return BA flights from Gatwick. A stay in the Yacht Club during the same week starts from £5,076 for a family of four, also including flights. For more information visit msccruises.co.uk or call 0203 426 3010.

Go online: To read a review of another *MSC* cruise go to cruise-international.com/msc-preziosa-review/



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Fairytale VOYAGE

With onboard cookery lessons from Marco Pierre White and singalong sessions with Abba in Stockholm, **Karen Pasquali Jones** decides a family cruise around the Baltic on P&O's Britannia is simply the best

Squeezing into the tiny recording booth, I knew exactly what to sing. There was a myriad of award-winning Abba songs to choose from but for my two children – Demetrio, aged 12 and seven-year-old Anais – and I there was only one that we all loved: *Mamma Mia*.

So stepping up to the microphone I waited for the soundtrack to start and joined in at full volume. The words came back so easily I hardly needed to glance at the lyrics on the screen in front of me.

But it was hard to concentrate with someone's elbows digging into my sides and a small child trying to push me out of the way. "I can't see," my son complained. My daughter scowled. "You're ruining it," she hissed. "We want to sing too."

There was no time for their sulks and silences now – we were taking part in the singing challenge at ABBA The Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, and I was desperate to win. So as my little girl's bottom lip jutted out further I sang louder, harmonising as hard as I could. And it was worth it as the points flashed up – 2,000, the highest of the day. "You're so embarrassing," my children said in unison as we headed for the next exhibit – a performance 'live' with holograms of Abba.

"Sit down," my husband muttered as I stood up to join Agnetha, Benny, Björn, and Anni-Frid on stage. It wasn't fair – why couldn't I sing *Dancing Queen* in 'concert' with Sweden's greatest export of all time?

My family aren't Abba fans like me, and didn't really understand why I was so excited to be standing in front of the costumes the other fab four wore to perform *Waterloo* when they won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1974. But they certainly started laughing as I pretended to be blonde bombshell Agnetha.

We had stopped off in Sweden as part of a two-week cruise around the Baltic on board Britain's biggest ship, P&O's *Britannia*. My daughter had named it the

Frozen tour – after the hit Disney movie – and we'd already visited Oslo in Norway, and Copenhagen in Denmark (which was naturally wonderful) after leaving Southampton in a flurry of Union flag-waving.

A busy day in Stockholm over (we also had time to visit the excellent Vasa museum), it was good to head back to our ship to set sail for our next port of call – St Petersburg, Russia. We had two days at sea after Sweden, so we made the most of our time exploring *Britannia*. It was hot for the Baltic – in the early 20s – and while braver passengers went for a dip in one of the four pools or sunbathed on deck, my children insisted on going to the kids' clubs.

In fact, we soon found out, every child on board insisted on going to the kids' clubs, and that's simply because they were excellent – possibly the best we've ever experienced at sea. The kids loved the packed and varied itineraries, with fun activities like Secret Agent Academy Training, Pirates Parties, Wizard Spells and a Golden Snitch Hunt for the younger ones and a cool club, in the real sense of the word, for tweens and teenagers. Along with the usual PS4, Wii and Air Hockey, there was a disco – with a light-up dance floor – jukebox, and karaoke (no Abba-mad mums allowed). For parents it was a well-devised edutainment programme where the kids were subconsciously learning and not sitting endlessly in front of a screen.

It meant that we could enjoy an adults-only dinner and go for a drink in The Crow's Nest, a chic bar at the front of the ship with the most amazing view as Captain David Pembridge nudged the ship towards our next destination. We'd sip on a prosecco (or two) and sail towards a pink and orange sunset, laughing as the Midnight Sun meant it failed to get dark and paused instead at twilight.

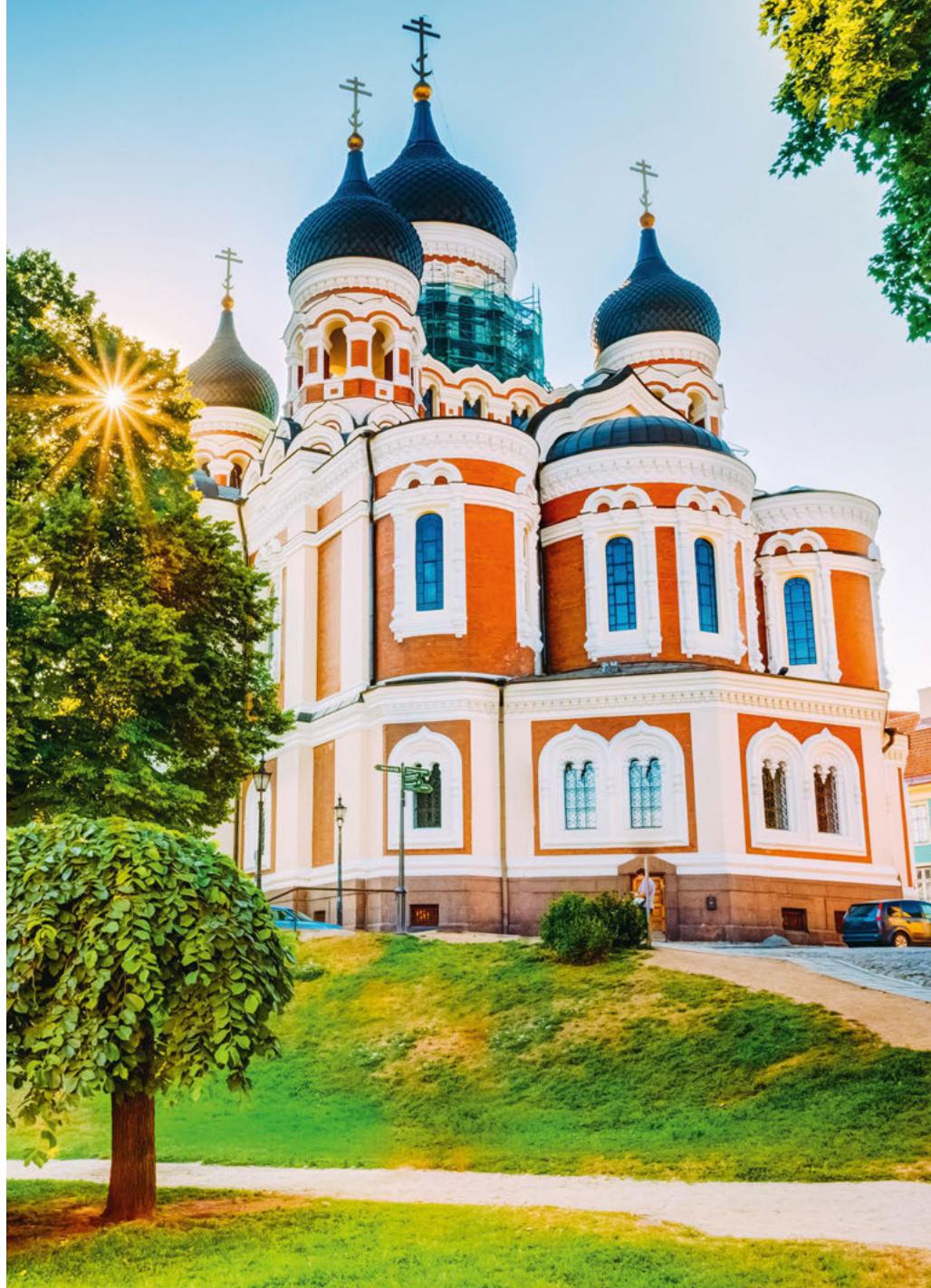
We never ran out of things to do. *Britannia* is not only Britain's biggest cruise ship, it's also one of the ➤



PHOTO: © AWL



WE SAILED TOWARDS A PINK
AND ORANGE SUNSET, LAUGHING
AS THE MIDNIGHT SUN MEANT IT
FAILED TO GET DARK



PHOTOS: © ANIL/CORBIS/ISTOCK



Clockwise, from top left:
Deme and Anais in the famous ABBA helicopter; Russian Orthodox church in Tallinn; Marco Pierre White's Masterclass; Swan Lake; Fabergé's famous eggs; Karen and her husband Alex dressed up for dinner on board

smartest with a multi-million pound art collection, theatre, fine dining and speciality restaurants, a cinema, the largest spa at sea, state-of-the-art gym with steam room, spin and yoga classes and endless movies on demand in our cabin.

We'd booked the cruise because of two reasons: Marco Pierre White was on board giving lessons at the cookery club, and because I've always wanted to go to Russia. Now, finally, I was about to discover the city billed as the 'jewel in the Baltic crown'. We had booked to see the Russian Ballet perform *Swan Lake* at the Palace Theatre in Arts Square the first evening of our two-day stay which ruled out a few of the major tours because of timings, and an excursion to the Fabergé Museum to see the famous eggs.

The children were enthralled by the collection of nine Imperial eggs German jeweler Carl Fabergé was commissioned to make by the Russian tsars. My favourite was the first – the 'simple' Hen Easter egg he made in 1885 for Emperor Alexander III's wife Maria Feodorovna. Inside the ivory-lined egg is a golden chicken. Sadly two other surprises, a ruby pendant and tiny diamond and gold replica of the Imperial Crown were lost after the Revolution and never found.

My daughter loved the Coronation egg, complete with tiny 18th century-style coronation carriage inside and was ecstatic when our guide took us to Fabergé's original workshop where a stern-looking assistant in the shop gave her a modern copy of the egg and carriage to play with. "Look, the wheels really move," she said, racing it up and down the glass counter housing giant diamonds and gorgeous Fabergé jewels. "How much is it?" I asked and blinked at the £24,000 price tag. "Better put it back," I said swiftly as my daughter asked to take it home.

Later, on our way to the ballet the guide, Kate – her Russian name was unpronounceable so she called herself after the Duchess of Cambridge – told us stomach-churning stories of the 900-day 'Leningrad siege' on the city by the Germans during World War II.

It put us in a sombre mood for the ballet but thanks to the theatre's gilded ceiling and ornate décor we were soon lost in one of the most famous ballets of all time. My husband and son rolled their eyes at the men in tights while my daughter and I craned forward, eager to catch every wonderful step. Sipping Champagne at the interval, I could hardly wait for the next act while the boys were eager for the final curtain to fall.

After another day exploring the city's hidden gems and spending our roubles on beautifully painted Russian dolls and vodka I was ready to leave Peter the Great's city behind and meet the other great attraction of this cruise: Marco Pierre White.

He was taking a masterclass at the cookery club – where James Martin and Eric 'Cake Boy' Lanlard also teach during Food Hero cruises – and I dragged my



son along to meet the man with three Michelin stars. "Is it going to be hard work?" he asked Marco, who laughed. "It will be fun young man," Marco promised, and it was. We spent the class learning how to make seafood risotto and lobster macaroni which my son ate while talking to Marco about football as well as food. I usually burn baked beans on toast but Marco is such a good teacher that my son demolished the lot.

I was in luck as I'd been invited to dine with Marco that night, and feasted on his charm and wit along with the delicious mushroom and truffle risotto and zesty lemon tart. It was a magical evening where he made us laugh as well as sharing some handy cooking tips – "a cheese grater for finely chopping onions is my culinary secret" – and signing copies of his recipe book. My son must have made an impression as Marco collected some pictures of him from the official photographer and signed them as a present.

The rest of the cruise was spent in wonderful cities – Helsinki, Tallinn and Bruges, and as we sailed towards Southampton I joined my family on deck to wave a Union flag on deck along to Rod Stewart – what else? – and Tina Turner. It brought a tear to my eye and summed up our Baltic cruise on *Britannia* perfectly. As a family holiday it really was Simply the Best. 

GETTING THERE

A 15-night cruise around the Caribbean on *Britannia* starts from £1,538pp. Departing 7 Nov 2015 the price includes flights and full board, and Marco Pierre White will be on board (pocruses.com/0843 374 0111).

Go online: To read more reviews of cruises on P&O ships go to cruise-international.com/category/cruise-ship-reviews/

Houston, NOT A PROBLEM

Take a Caribbean cruise on Carnival Freedom from Galveston, Texas and you can also explore the Lone Star State. **Becky Wiggins** saddles up





I'm not sure I make a good cowgirl. I'm sweltering and pink-faced in the full heat of the Texan sun as my new cowboy friends whoop and whistle, explaining the technicalities of lassoing. I can't help feeling sorry for the steer who is the subject of our demonstration, but he is soon freed and skitters back to join his buddies, kicking up dust from the orange dirt.

Cruising from Galveston means that you can spend a few days either side of your trip experiencing Texan culture; hence my somewhat reluctant role as trainee cowgirl at George Ranch Historical Park, just outside Houston, 50 miles from the port.

Soon, huge dark clouds were rolling in across the prairie and we took cover in a rusty red barn to sample the delights of the chuck wagon. After delicious beans, beef stew, peach cobbler and a reviving sweet peach tea, I felt much more like myself again.

With the rain not showing any signs of slowing, we headed towards the iconic skyline of Houston. There are 19 museums in the Museum District. We opted for the Houston Museum

SOON, HUGE DARK CLOUDS WERE ROLLING IN ACROSS THE PRAIRIE AND WE TOOK COVER IN A RUSTY RED BARN TO SAMPLE THE DELIGHTS OF THE CHUCK WAGON

of Natural Science and it turned out to be a good choice: we wandered the Hall of Ancient Egypt, marvelled at the dinosaur skeletons arranged in the Morian Hall of Palaeontology.

For dinner, we visited the Saltgrass Steakhouse at Kemah Boardwalk, a proper old-fashioned funfair straight out of an episode of *Scooby Doo*, complete with a rickety wooden rollercoaster. After being rattled half to death and spun upside down several times, I was ready for a huge steak and a nice sit down.

Of course, no visit to Houston would be complete without a trip to the Space Center. The official visitors' hub of NASA's Johnson Space Center boasts an array of fascinating exhibits, and the best way to see everything is to take the open air tram tour. Lasting about 90 minutes, it takes in Mission Control and astronaut training area Building 9. Visitors can also see the Apollo 17 command module and the awe-inspiring Saturn V Complex at

PHOTO: ©ISTOCK

Rocket Park. There are many things to see and do and we quickly ran out of time as we were headed to Galveston and our ship. Next time I would allow at least a half day at the Space Center.

You might be forgiven for not associating Texas with cruising, but although Galveston is a less well known cruise port, it's a great base to spend a few days before departing on a Caribbean cruise.

Flanked either side by the RedFrog Pub and the BlueIguana Tequila Bar (both already full of guests enjoying the party atmosphere) and dominated by a huge LED movie screen, the main pool deck area was loud and buzzy. Everyone was up on their feet dancing, and the cocktails flowed.

We soon discovered that Carnival take fun very seriously indeed. When we weren't whooshing down the Twister water slide, we were singing along to the poolside DJ or dancing around with the Cat in the Hat at the Seuss-a-Palooza parade. We even ate Green Eggs and Ham for breakfast.

The rooms on board *Carnival Freedom* are fun and functional; we had twin beds, plenty of storage space,

a combined shower and toilet and a room attendant called José, who left us creative towel art and was perpetually cheerful.

The entertainment was full on: a whirl of live performances, hilarious game shows and a cracking comedy club, although several times we found ourselves back in the relative quiet of the RedFrog Pub, where our favourite waiter knew our names and drinks preferences after the first night. The Alchemy Bar, a classy cocktail joint where drinks are custom-made by the resident mixologists, was also a favourite. There is also a huge and obviously popular casino, but it tended to be smoky, so we avoided it.

Our first port of call was the Mexican island of Cozumel, where one of the ferries took us on the short trip to the mainland. From there, we boarded a coach to Chaak Tun, a network of underwater caves and caverns. The Mayans occupied much of Mexico and these sinkholes were ➤

sacred to them. The caverns were often used as temples and for sacrificial rituals, although our guide Pablo was keen to point out that his Mayan ancestors weren't as bloodthirsty as they've been portrayed. As we descended into the gloom, ghostly, pale stalactites and tree roots hung down to block our path and stalagmites rose out of the depths. We gingerly followed Pablo, alternately swimming through deep pools, ducking underneath the water and balancing along slim ledges, bats swooping and flitting around our heads. Finally emerging, exhilarated, back into the sunshine, we were suddenly starving and were treated to a sumptuous feast of chicken tacos with spicy salsas, tamales, rice and beans. We felt privileged to have followed in the footsteps of the Mayans and experienced such beauty.

In Grand Cayman we took a boat trip to explore the beautiful shoreline. We travelled first to a sandbar known locally as Stingray City, where the rays have got used to visitors feeding them squid. The perfectly clear, pale turquoise water is waist height and the huge dark grey rays swoop in to greedily grab the squid out of your fingers. It's disconcerting but perfectly safe, apparently. Next, we made the short journey to Starfish Point. Bought by a local millionaire to prevent it being developed, it's a secluded peninsula with bright orange starfish dotted around the pale shore and lush green shaded areas. The ideal location for a lazy morning. On the way back we stopped at a local fish shack for fish tacos, ceviche and beer, while chickens tootled around at our feet and pastel coloured iguanas skittered across window ledges.

Back on the ship we enjoyed the tranquil adults-only Serenity spa deck, with its sunbathing pods and Jacuzzis. We also enjoyed the food and felt a little like we'd eaten all day as there's a never-ending stream of ice cream, frozen yogurt and pizza on deck, as well as Guy Fieri's excellent burger joint, with possibly the best burgers I've ever eaten. The food in Chic and Posh was exceptional, with attentive service, and menus that included traditional foods from our itinerary.

Our final port of call was Montego Bay, Jamaica, where we boarded a



Top to bottom: The 334ft Twister water slide on Carnival Freedom; the colours of the Caribbean



small coach to head up into the hills about 20 miles from the ship. It was a winding, bumpy drive, and along the way we saw bananas, bamboo and plantain trees wrestling for room with trailing vines and huge palms. African tulips with their blazing orange blooms occasionally breached the lush green and the roadside was dotted with houses of every colour.

We passed schoolchildren in immaculate uniforms and spotted fat chickens taking dust baths. At Croydon Plantation our guide promised a "walky, talky, touchy-feely, smelly, tasty" experience, and that's what we got. We wandered through acres of pineapple plants, pine trees, coffee and bananas. I shrieked at enormous spiders lurking on huge webs between the palms, and we picked and crushed lemongrass between our fingers, inhaling the heady scent, crunched on fresh white coconut and gorged on juicy, fat slices of fresh pineapple. The whole day was an assault on the senses and we didn't want it to end.

Back on board *Carnival Freedom*, we spent our last night in the sumptuous Sun King Steakhouse where I tasted the nicest bottle of wine I'd had in ages, and the filet mignon was perfectly cooked and meltingly tender. I was pleased to note that the meat being served was prime US beef. I may not make the best cowgirl, but I'm always very happy to support the industry in other ways. 

GETTING THERE

A seven-night Exotic Western Caribbean Fly Cruise on *Carnival Freedom* flying from London Heathrow on 26 September 2015 and sailing round-trip from Galveston, Texas to Mahogany Bay, Isla Roatan; Belize; and Cozumel, Mexico costs from £1,439pp. For more information call 0845 351 0556 or visit carnival.co.uk

Go online: You can read a review of a Carnival cruise from Miami in Florida to the Caribbean at cruise-international.com/carnival-cruise-review/



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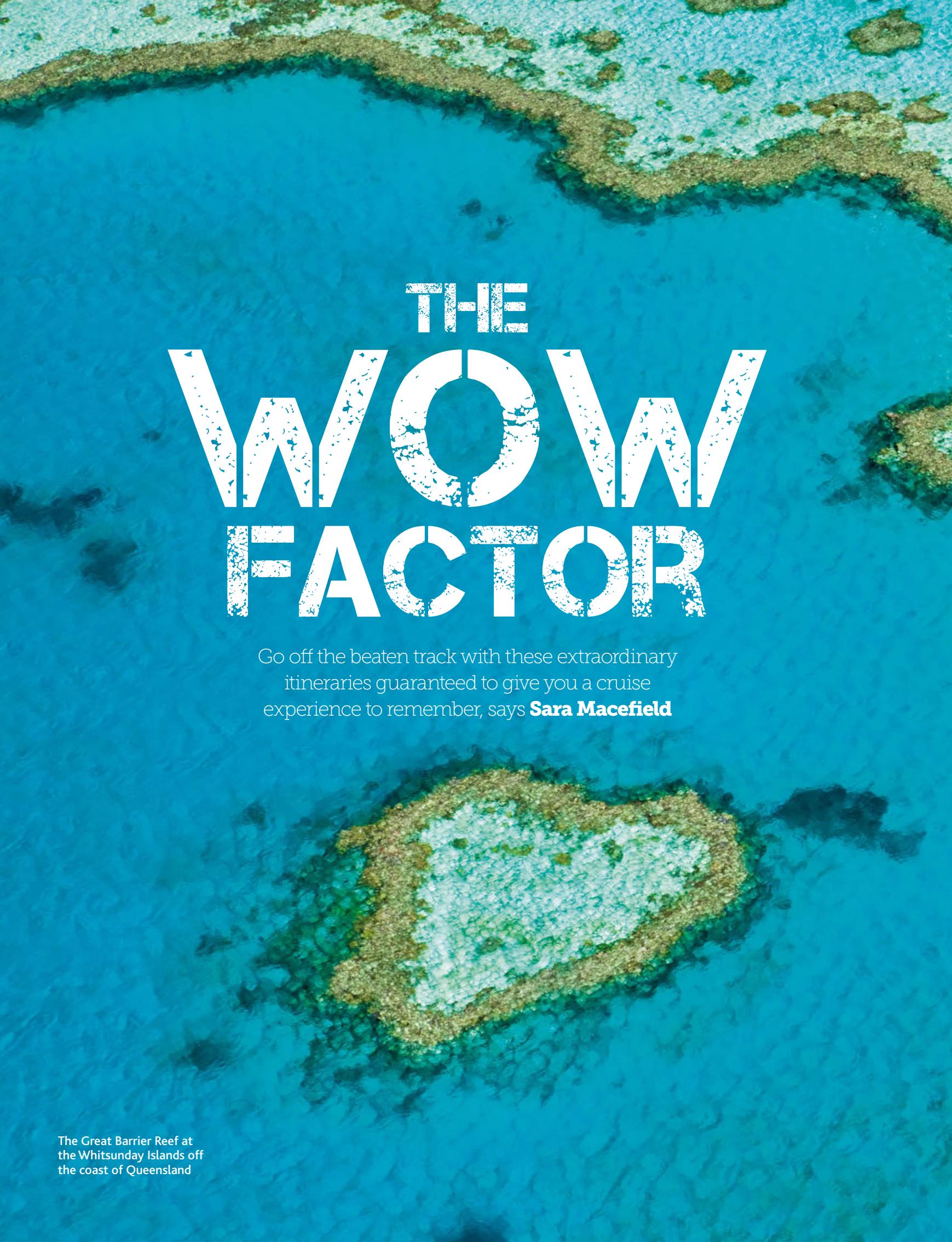
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ON FUN™**



THE WOW FACTOR

Go off the beaten track with these extraordinary
itineraries guaranteed to give you a cruise
experience to remember, says **Sara Macefield**

DOWN UNDER DISCOVERY

Take the plunge to get a fish's view of one of the world's ultimate natural marvels, Australia's Great Barrier Reef. The waters around this coral wonder team with shoals of colourful fish, along with turtles, barracudas and reef sharks. Dotted like tropical jewels around the edge of the reef are the beautiful Whitsunday Islands, including Hamilton Island, known for its golf and fine dining.

HIGHS: Snorkel or dive along the Great Barrier Reef at Hardy Island; soak up the beautiful sand beaches around Mooloolaba on the Sunshine Coast; and sail into Sydney for an overnight stay.

GETTING THERE: Azamara Club Cruises offers a 10-night *Great Barrier Reef* voyage from £2,347pp, cruise only. It departs on 5 January 2016 (azamaracruises.com). ►



Clockwise, from top left: The South Pacific, a paradise that has enticed many to its shores; the magical Mrauk U Pagodas, Myanmar; exploring the caves at the Puerto Princesa Subterranean National Park in the Philippines

PACIFIC PARADISE

What could be more surreal than cruising around the dreamy islands of the South Pacific? This intoxicating collection of exotic outposts in French Polynesia famously captivated the impressionist painter Paul Gauguin and has cast its spell over those who have followed in his footsteps ever since. Visit the island idylls of Bora Bora and Tahiti, famous for their lush surroundings and shimmering azure waters full of colourful marine life.

HIGHS: Spot dolphins in their natural habitat in Moorea; swim with manta rays in Bora Bora; and visit Cascade Tevaipo, one of the world's tallest waterfalls, which plunges a heart-stopping 1,100ft.

GETTING THERE: Oceania Cruises offers a 10-night *Papeete to Papeete* voyage from £3,709pp, including flights. The round-trip Tahiti sailing departs on 25 March 2016 (oceaniacruises.com).



MAGICAL MYANMAR

Sail into a world of ancient tribes and unexplored lands along the remote Chindwin River in Myanmar (Burma). In a country only just opening up to tourism and where most visitors opt for cruises on the better known Irrawaddy River, go one better and opt for the Chindwin. The tributary is only navigable by a few select larger craft in summer and this has preserved the unexplored feel of the tribal lands and villages along its 87-mile route towards Homalin, near the Indian border.

HIGHS: Visit the evocative town of Bagan, famous for thousands of temples and shrines; watch monks being ordained at a monastery in Mokhtaw; and visit a working elephant camp near the colonial town of Mawlaik.

GETTING THERE: Sanctuary Retreats offers a 10-night *Chindwin Mandalay-Homalin-Bagan* cruise from £2,729pp, excluding flights. The Mandalay to Bagan voyage departs on 22 July and 1 August 2016 (sanctuaryretreats.com).

ISLAND DELIGHTS

Spanish colonial history and lush island hideaways give the Philippines a combination of cultural riches and scenic beauty that have made them an intoxicating cruising stop. This Asian archipelago is a place where modern metropolises contrast with sleepy backwaters and deserted islands with some of the most beautiful vistas.

HIGHS: Step out to explore the colonial charms of Old Manila on a walking tour; take an outrigger boat ride through the Hundred Islands archipelago; and go underground to discover Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park.

GETTING THERE: Seabourn offers a 35-night *Lands of Silk & Spice* sailing from £13,499pp, excluding flights. The Hong Kong to Singapore cruise departs on 13 March 2016 (seabourn.com). ►





Breathtaking sights such as this are common on safari in South Africa

AFRICAN ODYSSEY

Enjoy an intoxicating taste of animal magic on a voyage that showcases the best of South Africa's wildlife with game drives to spot safari's 'Big Five' of lion, buffalo, rhino, leopard and elephant, along with zebra and giraffe. Combine this with a few days in Cape Town, one of the world's most beautiful cities, where you can jump on a cable car for awe-inspiring views from the top of Table Mountain.

HIGHS: Take a fascinating tour to Robben Island, famous as the prison where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated; visit three of the country's best game parks; and explore the country's famously picturesque Garden Route.

GETTING THERE: Voyages to Antiquity offers a 13-night *Game Parks of South Africa* package that comprises a 12-night round-trip sailing from Cape Town from £2,995pp, including flights. It departs on 4 January 2016 (voyagestoantiquity.com). ►



SIZZLING SOUTH AMERICA

Travel to a little piece of the United Kingdom in the South Atlantic on a voyage that features the Falkland Islands along with South America's exotic hotspots and spectacular scenery. Experience the seductive samba charms of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, to the captivating European and Latin culture of Montevideo in Uruguay and bountiful wildlife, all set against a stunning backdrop of the Andes mountain range and its glaciers.

HIGHS: Sail around the infamous Cape Horn; explore the dramatic landscapes of Patagonia from Punta Arenas in Chile or take a flight over Antarctica; cruise past the dramatic Amalia and Pio XI glaciers.

GETTING THERE: P&O Cruises offers a 15-night *South Atlantic & Chilean Fjords* cruise sailing from £2,849pp, with flights. It departs on 24 January 2016 (pocruses.com).

Clockwise, from top left: Los Cuernos, Torres del Paine National Park, Chile; a Huli tribal dancer, Goroka, Papua New Guinea; the Ganges at Varanasi, the river's holiest spot



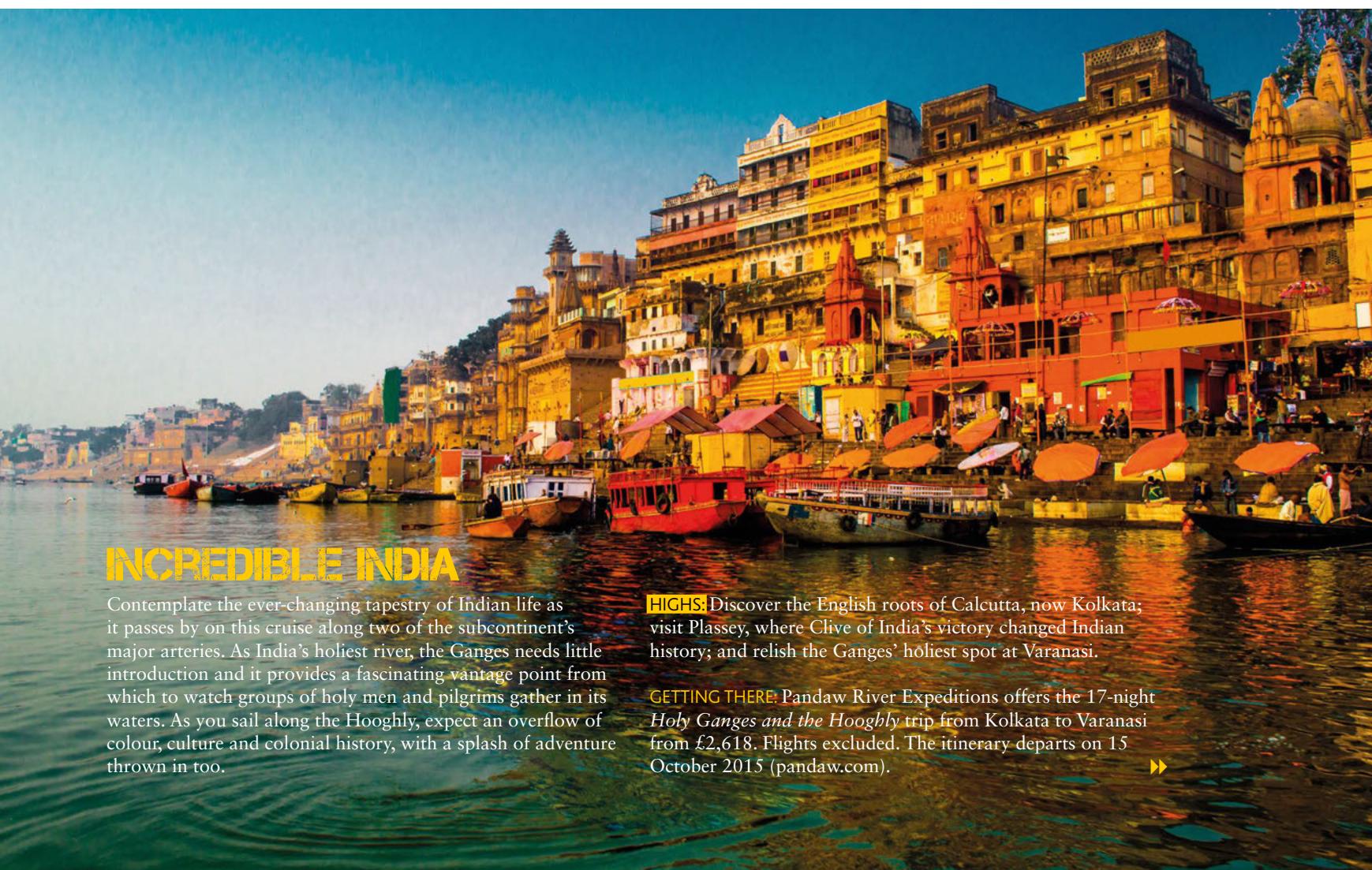
WORLD OF WONDERS

Welcome to Papua New Guinea, one of the last of the world's great wildernesses, famous for ancient tribes and feared headhunters who practised their grisly customs until well into the last century. Discover lush rainforests brimming with exotic birdlife and cobalt waters full of fuchsia-coloured corals and vivid tropical fish. This is a land barely touched by tourism and full of authentic experiences.

HIGHS: Immerse yourself in the Alotau Cultural Festival at the Wanigili Centre in Alotau; explore the Japanese World War Two tunnels in Rabaul; and visit the Mount Tovanumbatir volcanic observatory on the north coast that monitors nearly 40 volcanoes in the country and offers some far-reaching views over Simpson Harbour.

GETTING THERE: Princess Cruises offers a 15-night *Papua New Guinea* voyage from £1,548pp, excluding flights. The round-trip Sydney sailing departs on 19 May 19 2016 (princess.com).

PHOTOS: © MICHELE FAI ZONE/AWL IMAGES, JM ZUCKERMAN/ALAMY/ISTOCK



INCREDIBLE INDIA

Contemplate the ever-changing tapestry of Indian life as it passes by on this cruise along two of the subcontinent's major arteries. As India's holiest river, the Ganges needs little introduction and it provides a fascinating vantage point from which to watch groups of holy men and pilgrims gather in its waters. As you sail along the Hooghly, expect an overflow of colour, culture and colonial history, with a splash of adventure thrown in too.

HIGHS: Discover the English roots of Calcutta, now Kolkata; visit Plassey, where Clive of India's victory changed Indian history; and relish the Ganges' holiest spot at Varanasi.

GETTING THERE: Pandaw River Expeditions offers the 17-night *Holy Ganges and the Hooghly* trip from Kolkata to Varanasi from £2,618. Flights excluded. The itinerary departs on 15 October 2015 (pandaw.com). ►

TOP OF THE WORLD

This must be the ultimate adventure: a 75-night sailing on the tough Russian icebreaker Kapitan Khlebnikov that circumnavigates the Arctic, travelling through the Northeast Passage to the Russian Arctic, around the isolated coast of Greenland, through the Canadian Arctic and on to the legendary Northwest Passage. For those wanting a taste of this unforgettable experience, the voyage has been split into sections of 18 days upwards.

HIGHS: Get a bird's eye view of the pack ice of the East Siberian Sea from one of the ship's two helicopters; admire the breathtaking views along Uummannaq on Greenland's west coast; and meet the locals of Sachs Harbour, the most northerly permanent settlement in Canada's Northwest Territories.

GETTING THERE: Quark Expeditions offers the full Arctic Circumnavigation from £55,072pp, with the four sectors – *Epic Northeast Passage, Extreme Greenland, Best of the Canadian High Arctic and Ultimate Northwest Passage* starting at £13,568pp. Flights excluded. The journey starts in Anchorage on 10 July 2016, from where passengers are flown to Anadyr in Russia (quarkexpeditions.com/gb). ►

ADVENTURE CRUISES

A humpback whale
breaches the waters off the
coast of Greenland



INTO THE TROPICS

Immerse yourself in the lush jungle of the Amazon rainforest where flocks of macaws and parakeets put on a dazzling show and squirrel monkeys swing through the thick tree canopy. The Amazon River that cuts through the forest is home to an exotic collection of intriguing and fearsome creatures, including caiman, piranha fish, to giant river otters and pink river dolphins.

HIGHS: Stride out on a night walk through the forest in the Yasuni National Park, Ecuador; meet tribespeople to learn about their culture; and visit clay licks where parrots and parakeets congregate in their thousands.

GETTING THERE: Titan offers an 11-night *Amazon Adventure* from £3,299pp, comprising a week's Amazon cruise and three nights in Quito; including flights, departing 9 June 2016 (titantravel.co.uk). 

Go online: To read more cruise reviews including a trip down the Zambezi in Africa visit cruise-international.com

PHOTO: © ALEX ROBINSON/AWL IMAGES



ULTIMATE *glamour*

Regent Seven Seas Cruises offers incredible laid-back all-inclusive luxury – and new ship Seven Seas Explorer promises exceptional experiences at sea



Chalk July 2016 in your diary; the date the new *Seven Seas Explorer*, heralded as the most luxurious cruise ship in the world, sets sail on its inaugural season in the Med.

It will be the culmination of years of planning by Regent Seven Seas Cruises, a six-star company already well versed in the meaning of luxury. After all, this is the cruise line that brought the world the first all-suite, all-balcony ships and delivers truly all-inclusive prices, from flights and transfers to drinks, gratuities, shore excursions, even wifi.

Carrying just 750 guests, the all-suite, all-balcony ship rivals the best hotels in the world in terms of quality and craftsmanship. Regent has pulled in some of the top teams in the world from renowned architectural and interior design firms Tillberg Design AB, RTKL Associates and ICRAVE to design the ship and the result is breathtaking; vibrant colours and plush textiles add a glamourous feel.

Highlights include the Canyon Ranch SpaClub, where guests can visit the Thermal Suite where a variety of hot-to-cold experiences await including; a state-of-the-art infrared sauna, an aromatic steam room, a



cold room and even the soothing shower room offers guests the chance to experience chroma-therapeutic lighting and audio effects that mimic natural sounds such as thunderstorms or waterfalls. An inviting teak-deck terrace filled with wonderfully plush lounge chairs surround a beautiful infinity-edge plunge pool. The pool contours to the stern of the ship, treating guests to incredible views across the sea to the horizon.

For relaxation of a different kind, step into the Explorer Lounge for a pre-dinner cocktail in a country club-style setting with rich mahogany woods that are complemented with leather chairs and blue fabrics.

SEVEN SEAS EXPLORER'S INAUGURAL SEASON

Rome to Venice

14 September 2016 | 10-nights |

Venice to Monte Carlo

24 September 2016 | 10-nights |

Monte Carlo to Athens

4 October 2016 | 8-nights |

Athens to Istanbul

12 October 2016 | 10-nights |

Istanbul to Jerusalem

22 October 2016 | 11-nights |

Jerusalem to Rome

2 November 2016 | 14-nights |

Rome to Miami

16 November 2016 | 16-nights |

Miami roundtrip

4 December 2016 | 14-nights |

Miami roundtrip

18 December 2016 | 10-nights |

Miami to Los Angeles

28 December 2016 | 16-nights |

Fares for *Seven Seas Explorer's* inaugural season start from £4,079 pp (based on a 4 October 2016 departure).

Seven Seas Explorer's new 2017 itineraries will be announced in October



The Constellation Theatre, on the other hand, takes you back to Hollywood's Golden Age, with vivid blue seats, all with unobstructed views, matched to handy side tables topped by Murano glass lamps.

Other exciting new features on *Seven Seas Explorer* include a Culinary Arts Kitchen. With all the style and glamour of a prestigious cooking school in France, there are 18 individual cooking stations where you can learn to create dishes under the guidance of expert chefs and the Meridian Lounge entertainment venue near the theatre.

But top billing has to go to the Regent Suite, a one-off luxury apartment that eclipses some of the best pads in Manhattan. At 3,875 square feet, it is the biggest suite at sea and the only one with its own spa and sauna, steam room and even heated loungers. Unlimited spa treatments are included, as are airport transfers and shore excursions by private limos.

Passengers staying in this exclusive suite will be able to entertain friends at a black marble bar to the sounds of live music played on the suite's Steinway piano. Occupants can share the captain's 270-degree views of the ocean from their glass-enclosed Vista

Garden at the front of the ship or just lie in bed and enjoy the sea views.

There is only one Regent Suite, but naturally there is plenty of other sumptuous accommodation, from spacious entry-level Veranda Suites to Park Avenue-styled Master Suites, all kitted out with the quality fittings and furnishings you'd expect from the world's most luxurious ship. Choose a suite at Penthouse level or above and you'll be looked after by a private butler; opt for a Concierge or above and you'll enjoy unlimited free wifi.

Step outside your suite and you'll find many of Regent Seven Seas Cruises' signature dining venues, all featuring the spectacular new look. There is certainly something to suit every taste, from succulent steaks and Italian favourites to the delicious multi-course menus served in the Compass Rose main dining room and Gallic classics in a stylish new French restaurant, Chartreuse.

Star billing in the Compass Rose has to go to the stunning chandelier made from a cascade of aqua-blue glass 'teardrops' that brings the feel of the ocean into the room. The restaurant has an open-seating policy so diners are free to eat when and with whom they wish.

THE REGENCY DIFFERENCE

Regent Seven Seas Cruises is cruising as it should be – relaxed, understated elegance, with a friendly, welcoming ambience and the freedom to enjoy exquisite dining at times to suit you. Superbly crafted itineraries take you to the world's best destinations in style, and there are free unlimited shore excursions. And with so much space on board, there's always a deck lounger or seat at the bar with your name on it. Sophisticated but never stuffy, a cruise with Regent is all about enjoying the very best that life has to offer – and because it's all-inclusive, all you have to focus on is having a wonderful holiday. Here's what you can expect on board:

- All-suite accommodation with L'Occitane and Hermès bathroom products and complimentary in-suite mini bar stocked daily.
- Gourmet dining without any cover charges, and 24-hour room service delivered with full table service, linen and cutlery. Plus all fine wines, Champagne, speciality teas and coffees are included for no extra charge.
- Onboard entertainment, including shows, lectures, fitness classes and activities included.
- No gratuities or service charges to pay. Plus free return flights and transfers and a pre-cruise hotel stay if you choose a Concierge Suite or higher.

Clockwise

from top left:
Penthouse suite;
the Chartreuse
restaurant; the
glamorous atrium

La Veranda self-service provides a casual dining alternative with indoor and al-fresco seating for breakfast and lunch. In the evening it converts into Sette Mari at La Veranda, an upscale Italian restaurant.

With its leather chairs, dazzling white table cloths and intimate alcoves, Prime 7 steakhouse will exude the style and sophistication of a London private members' club. The library to one side of the restaurant doubles as a private dining room for those in search of ultimate exclusivity.

And then there are two tantalising new gourmet restaurants: Chartreuse, featuring a classic French menu with a modern twist that will evoke memories of a chic Parisian restaurant; and dramatic specialty restaurant Pacific Rim, which will offer a delicious and diverse array of delightfully prepared pan-Asian dishes to be savoured in an elegant dining room.

The icing on the cake is that all dining, and specialty restaurants, is included in the price. What else would you expect from the winning combination of a cruise on the world's most luxurious ship with the most-inclusive cruise line in the world? 

Find out more: Call 02380 682153 or visit rssc.com or sevenseaseexplorer.co.uk



Tall STORY

Star Clippers offers a different kind of cruise experience. **Abigail King** finds her sea legs





Beneath a bright blue sky, the sort where the sunshine bites if you look for too long, the white sails billowed overhead. Thunder crashed, not from the heavens but from the ropes hauling the sails into place as the four-masted *Star Flyer* left port.

As one of the tallest tall ships around, anchored at the glitzy movie port of Cannes, the spectacle seemed entirely appropriate. In a spray of sparkling seawater, our four-day voyage along the French Riviera began, carried by a ship that echoed the 19th century golden age of sail.

The masts of *Star Flyer* stand a proud 226ft tall. It was the first ship of its kind built since before the First World War, and has a twin sister, the *Star Clipper*, and a younger sister, the *Royal Clipper*, which holds the Guinness World Record for being the biggest five-masted ship in the world. Plus there's a fourth vessel in the works, as Star Clippers aims to build the world's biggest square-rigger.

These same magnificent ships also plough through the ice of the Baltic and glide through the warmth of the tropical Indian Ocean.

Owner Mikael Krafft explained the vision for his dream: "As a child, I used to build ships. It was a hobby I didn't want to let go. I just love to sail and I wanted everyone to have the experience of stepping on to their private yacht."

That explains the general feel of *Star Flyer*, which has a degree of

informality not found in larger cruise ships. Or so I'm told. The truth is that this 170-passenger cruise ship is the largest I've stepped foot on (unless you count Channel ferries and yachts). It's left me with a certain apprehension for these giant stalwarts of the sea.

I needn't have worried. The claustrophobic queues I'd imagined just didn't materialise: it's easy enough to hop on and hop off the frequent services that whisked us about in Corsica, St Tropez and Monaco.

And there's certainly no hint of washing up lonely in this seasoned crowd. Krafft explained how everyone knows everyone else after three days

Clockwise,
from left: Star
Flyer; a Corsican
church; Star
Flyer's traditional
helm; the crest
of the French
coastguard; a
game of boules

at sea, while more than one of the passengers I met cited a Star Clippers ship as the place they found their partner. Perhaps that's why more than 60 per cent of passengers are repeat customers, at home with the vessel and familiar to the crew.

No, the only cause for concern, if it could be called that, was the revelation of my nautical ignorance: I just didn't know enough of the technical terms.

I could fumble my way through the bridge, the galley, the deck and the crow's nest but by the time we'd reached the bilge, mainsheets, tenders and baggywrinkles, I was flustered in the muster station.



THERE IS NO HINT OF WASHING UP LONELY ON
STAR FLYER. AFTER A FEW DAYS EVERYBODY KNOWS
EVERYONE ELSE: SOME EVEN MEET THEIR PARTNERS





Over dinner on the first night it transpired that I didn't even know the difference between a ship and a boat (compounding my social disgrace by comparing kayaks to canoes).

But in the morning, as the green-ochre coast of Corsica glided into view, I remembered a phrase uttered by its most infamous son, Napoléon Bonaparte: "You would make a ship sail against the winds and currents by lighting a bonfire under her decks? I have no time for such nonsense." Such was the reaction of French emperor on hearing about the invention of the steamboat. If the self-proclaimed High Emperor of France and Protector of the Confederation of the Rhine was slow to appreciate nautical technology, I'd allow myself the odd lapse in vocabulary.

Corsica, the childhood home of this fearsome man, offers respite from revolution today. Hiking trails cross craggy peaks and a sandy stretch of beach lies footsteps away from the quiet port of Calvi.

My feet led me along a steep and cobbled road to the citadel and up, up, up through a series of hairpin turns. Burgundy begonias clustered around tables and voices echoed inside the pink-walled churches. Bright boats swayed on the turquoise water below

Clockwise, from left: Pretty houses in St Tropez; the mast and stern of Star Flyer

and in the distance, *Star Flyer* waited, sails down, masts upright, ropes a spidery network of yesteryear's sailing.

Somewhat distracted and exhilarated by my surroundings, I returned to the lower town to confront what was to become a recurring dilemma: where to have lunch?

Corsica, like many places in France, tempts with cosy bistros and handwritten menus in chalk, yet back on *Star Flyer* a permanent feast awaits. The single restaurant serves fresh buffet breakfasts and lunches that – importantly in this modern world – cater for all sorts of allergies, intolerances and personal beliefs.

Afternoons brought sushi and creole-inspired snacks, while tea and coffee were available all day long. Dinners were more formal, yet the dress code, like everything else, felt relaxed: long trousers for men, no flip flops, and no swimsuits.

Alas, the weather "unfriended" us as we pulled into Monaco, the usually shimmering skyscrapers subdued against the clouds. But everything else in the principality was abuzz. It was the peak of Grand Prix season and from the shore to the Monte Carlo Casino, the buzz of speeding cars filled the air like angry wasps. Formula One aficionados delighted in retracing the route, while I turned my ears to some live music in a bar.

After Monaco we headed west but swell thwarted us from reaching the beach at St Tropez, leaving me to take refuge in my favourite part of the ship: the library. Snuggled up on scarlet velvet, I browsed through books and lingered over the brushstrokes of the antique clipper paintings.

The cabins also doubled as boutique retreats as the wild winds

blew. Each room had a private TV and DVD player, with white cotton sheets tucked beneath a gold metallic bedspread with royal blue trim.

But bad luck can only last so long and by the time we reached the final afternoon of our cruise, the swell had calmed and the sky returned to the kind of azure blue that befits the French Riviera.

And the former fishing village of St Tropez dazzled in the sun. Silver boules glistened as pétanque players stooped beneath plane trees, chrome letters sparkled above stylish bars and a line of glossy yachts shone as though there was no tomorrow. It is a seductive place, blending mosaic-studded fish markets with 1950s glamour, and impressionist art from Matisse and his mates, showcased in a former chapel; the perfect final port of call for our voyage.

As we prepared to say goodbye to the French Riviera, *Star Flyer* filled its sails to grace the waves for the final trip back to Cannes; music thundering from the ship's loudspeakers, ropes spinning and sails billowing – all thanks to the persistence of one man and his childhood dream. 

GETTING THERE

A three-night cruise on board *Star Flyer* costs from £799pp, including return flights from London, transfers and all meals on board. Visit stardclippers.co.uk or call 0808 231 4798.

Go online: For more adventures go to cruise-international.com/antarctica-cruise-review/



BARCELONA

From the cool Gothic Quarter to the splendour of Gaudi's masterpieces and its vibrant beaches, Barcelona is a never-ending feast for the senses, says **Liz Jarvis**

Barcelona is the kind of city where you can wander aimlessly and always stumble across something quite extraordinary, from historical squares to modern art sculptures, colourful graffiti and churches.

While a stroll along Las Ramblas is a must, take a detour from the main thoroughfare and you'll quickly find yourself in a maze of narrow streets strung with washing and shady squares lined with tapas bars.

The beauty of Barcelona is that everything is within an easy shuttle bus or taxi ride from Moll Adossat Cruise Terminal – or if you're feeling energetic, you can stroll along to the harbour and the Christopher Columbus monument, where at weekends you'll find a charming flea market.

Must-sees

Antoni Gaudí's unfinished basilica, La Sagrada Família, is arguably one of the greatest buildings in the world; while you can get a lasting impression from the outside, it's definitely worth taking a look at the intricate detailing inside, too, including the columns designed to look like trees and branches. Construction began in 1882 and it's anticipated that it will be finished in 2026. Gaudí's other legacy to his beloved city is the fabulous Park Güell, a glorious park of colourful mosaics, tropical plants and breathtaking vistas – on a clear day you can see right across the city.

With its location on the north-east coast of Spain, Barcelona's beaches are a major attraction, of course. Barcelonata is by far the most popular, although be prepared – an umbrella and sunbed will set you back around 10 euros. It does have the advantage of some fabulous tapas bars where you

can eat lunch al fresco. For a different view of the city, take the cable car.

Football fans will probably want to see Camp Nou, the home of FC Barcelona and some of the world's best players. Slightly on the outskirts but still worth a visit is the Design Museum, where you can see fashion creations from Spanish legends, including Balenciaga.

What to eat

A new trend in Barcelona is the rise in *pintxos* or pincho bars – a bit like tapas, but they're moreish bite-sized snacks on sticks. Try Telerific on Plaça del Dr Letamendi for extremely good ones. Llamber (llamberbarcelona.com) celebrates seasonal ingredients from the Catalunyan mountains to the sea, as well as national produce, and offers tapas with a contemporary twist, including carpaccio of salmon with citrus and ginger ice cream to succulent meats and cheeses.

There are lots of tapas bars to choose from along the beachfront, particularly in Barcelonata; Barraca (on Passeig Maritim) serves up fresh fish, shellfish and paella, washed down with a glass of organic wine or Cava.

Shopping

The shops in the Las Ramblas area tend to be quite touristy, but it's still worth exploring – particularly on a Sunday morning when it's not so crowded and the market is setting up. If you want to visit a department store, then El Corte Inglés on Plaza de Catalunya is the only one in the city, or you can get the metro to Poblenou where you'll find two large shopping malls. Hip shoe brand Camper is actually Spanish – you can find their shop near the Museum of Contemporary Art; or if you fancy window-shopping for a pair of heels by Spanish designer Manolo Blahnik, head for the Eixample district and the Passeig de Gràcia. 

Clockwise, from above: The skyline of Barcelona viewed from Park Güell, designed by Antoni Gaudí; the Balinese-themed roof terrace at the Hotel Pulitzer; tapas bars are abundant throughout the city; an elegant Pulitzer bedroom; dawn breaks on Barcelonata beach





ESSENTIALS

Getting around

The hop-on-hop-off Barcelona 'bus turístico' will cost you 27 euros for the day or 38 euros for a two-day pass, available from barcelonaturisme.com. It's open top, which means you can soak up the sun while exploring the main attractions. There are three different routes that are interconnected, it is super easy to navigate and comes with an audio narrative. The pass also offers discounts into most of the tourist attractions. Alternatively, the metro is a quicker way to get to places off the beaten track and bike hire costs from six euros for the day.

Where to stay

With its cool, contemporary interiors and relaxed ambience, the Hotel Pulitzer, located just off Las Ramblas and Plaça de Catalunya, is perfectly situated for strolling to the bars and restaurants of the city centre. Superior rooms, designed by Lázaro Rosa-Violán, are spacious and light, with traditional balconies that make the ideal spot for people-watching, super-comfy beds with Egyptian cotton sheets, free wifi, flatscreen TVs, bathrobes and slippers and elegant grey and black marble bathrooms. The lobby bar offers a stunning space for afternoon tea or a glass of Cava, and has an excellent cocktail menu; there's also a delightful sunny spot for breakfast. In the evening, take the elevator up to the beautiful Balinese-inspired roof terrace for an al fresco pre-dinner cocktail surrounded by tropical plants and a superb view of the city (we recommend the Cocktail Pulitzer, a Cosmo with a twist).

Rooms cost from 140 euros per room per night, based on two people sharing on a B&B basis. To book go to chiccollection.com or call 0203 735 5033.

 **Go online:** For more tips on making the most of your visit to Barcelona go to barcelonaturisme.com



RIVER CRUISE *News*

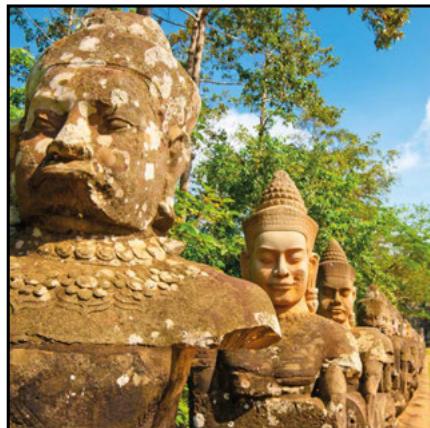
SHIPS • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS

NEW ROUTES FOR EMERALD

Emerald Waterways, the river cruise line which launched last year, has announced it will be offering fully inclusive river cruising and touring to Southeast Asia. Destinations will include Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

The cruise line has chartered the five-star luxury vessel *Mekong Navigator* for its Southeast Asia itineraries. Onboard facilities include a spa, sundeck library and opulent suites decorated to blend the French colonial style and rich culture of the region.

To celebrate the launch of its new itinerary, Emerald Waterways is offering an exclusive discount £1,000 per couple until 31 August. For more information on the tours go to emeraldwaterways.co.uk.



CRUISE THE YANGTZE WITH SAGA

Saga's new escorted tour and river cruise to China includes two nights in Shanghai, four nights sailing the Yangtze on the 266-passenger *Victoria Anna*, two nights in Chongqing and a ride on the bullet train to Chengdu to meet the pandas at the Panda Breeding Centre.

The tour also includes a three-night stay in Beijing and a visit to the Great Wall. For more information call free on 0800 096 0078 or visit travel.saga.co.uk/holidays.



New brochure from Titan

Titan Travel, in partnership with the deluxe river cruise operator Uniworld, has launched the first edition of its new 2016 river cruise brochure with savings of up to £1,100 per person on bookings made before 30 September 2015.

As a further incentive, previous Uniworld clients can enjoy exclusive additional River Heritage Club discounts of up to £100 per person on cruises of up to 12 nights in duration or £170 per person on cruises of 13 nights or more.

There are 27 itineraries showcased, including the scenic waterways of Europe, Russia,

China, Vietnam, India and Egypt. For more information go to titantravel.co.uk/uniworld.



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Want to explore Asia in luxury? Titan Travel, in partnership with Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection, offers itineraries to the world's most iconic destinations





From the vibrant colours and stunning palaces of India to the ancient temples of Cambodia and the intriguing history of Vietnam, a river cruise-and-stay adventure in Asia offers exceptional experiences and memories that will last a lifetime.

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All cruise-and-stay itineraries include guided tours that perfectly complement the itineraries. Titan's complimentary VIP Home Departure Service, winner of Best Cruise Product or Service at the Cruise International Awards 2014, offers personal door-to-door transfers from your home, making your holiday a relaxing experience from start to finish. If you live in northern England, mainland Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, you can even make use of free home transfers to a selection of regional airports and complimentary domestic flights to London.

INDIA'S GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Explore exotic destinations including the intoxicating city of Delhi; Agra, with the magnificent Taj Mahal, which you can visit at sunrise when the pristine white marble monument is aglow with the soft pink of dawn; and the romantic Pink City of Jaipur on this incredible 14-day itinerary, which includes a seven-night river cruise on board *Ganges Voyager II*, with its exquisite interiors and sumptuous suites. Beginning and ending in Kolkata on the Lower Ganges, the cruise follows India's holiest river. During your river cruise you can expect to see sadhus (holy men) and yogis deep in meditation, women in vibrant-coloured saris washing clothes along the riverbank, and scenic rice fields, as well as some of the most beautiful temples in the world. This incredible adventure includes scheduled flights, shore excursions in the company of English-speaking local guides and of course, Titan's acclaimed VIP Home Departure Service – a complimentary door-to-door chauffeur service.

TIMELESS WONDERS OF VIETNAM

From the French colonial splendour of Ho Chi Minh City to the magnificent ruins of Angkor, this itinerary

takes you on a journey through two of the most intriguing countries in Southeast Asia: Vietnam and Cambodia. Your tour includes seven nights in luxurious accommodation in Ho Chi Minh City, Siem Reap and Hanoi, and a seven-night cruise along The Mekong on board the stunning ship *River Orchid*, which is beautifully handcrafted in French colonial style. The itinerary includes a visit to the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek, a sobering reminder of Cambodia's recent troubled past; you will also visit glittering temples, Phnom Penh and take a sampan to a floating village where you can experience the sights, sounds and smells of life along The Mekong, one of the most fascinating rivers in the world.



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VIENNESE *whirl*

Butlers, Champagne and waltzing – a cruise along the Danube on board Scenic Jasper is an enriching experience, discovers **Jeannine Williamson**



DANUBE CRUISE

The Hofburg
Palace, Vienna





“Left forward for the men, right back for the ladies,” instructs Harald as I stare down at my immobile feet. It sounds so simple, and Harald and his elegant partner Katharina made it look effortless as they spun around to the familiar strains of the *Blue Danube*. So much so, I raised my hand to volunteer for the waltz lesson, which is now proving to be pretty entertaining for the audience of passengers watching our first efforts shuffling around the dance floor.

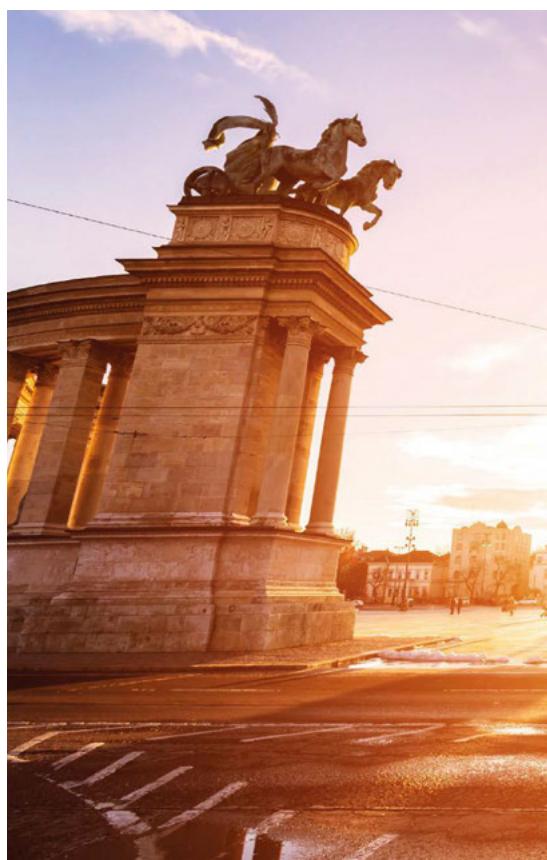
But Harald’s patience pays off, and within 20 minutes we’ve more or less mastered the basic box step that forms the foundation of Vienna’s famous dance. We even get a polite, possibly sympathetic, round of applause. It’s among many memorable moments I experience on board one of Scenic’s newest river vessels.

The ‘Scenic Enrich’ experiences provide an enjoyable mix of entertainment and culture, a great way to soak up history, traditions and everyday life in the heart of Europe. Life afloat, and ashore, also

has a very carefree vibe thanks to the all-inclusive pricing policy covering excursions, tips and drinks - including Champagne.

I’m even more spoilt as I have a butler. In fact, everyone on *Scenic Jasper* has one. Not being accustomed to the *Downton Abbey* lifestyle I’m unsure what to ask him to do. So I’m delighted to find a handy card in my stateroom setting out butler services, including early morning tea and coffee, shoe shine, booking tables in the vessel’s speciality restaurants and restocking the complimentary minibar (services differ depending on the different stateroom grades). Istvan goes above and beyond the call of duty by removing spirits that I don’t drink and reconfiguring the minibar with wall-to-wall gin and tonics and ordering me a G&T from the bar whenever he sees me. No wonder days drift by so pleasantly. He also gives me a ‘driving lesson’ in the stateroom, demonstrating how the grey cube on the bedside table lights up to become a clock at the clap

Clockwise from above:
The imposing Hungarian parliament overlooking the Danube; Heroes’ Square, Budapest



UNACCUSTOMED TO THE DOWNTON ABBEY LIFESTYLE
I'M UNSURE WHAT TO ASK THE BUTLER TO DO, SO I'M
DELIGHTED TO FIND A CARD SETTING OUT THE SERVICE



of a hand and how the TV can be switched to a relaxing fireplace with 'real' flickering flames.

Our cruise from Budapest to Nuremberg is filled with big-hitting sights from day one, when we embark on a tour of the Hungarian capital that is a city of two halves. On one side is green and leafy Buda, dominated by the grand Castle district, and on the Danube's other bank is busy Pest, with impressive Heroes' Square, the wide main boulevard Andrassy Avenue and parliament building inspired by Westminster Palace in London. The Chain Bridge, guarded by large stone lions, is the best way to switch sides. Opened in 1849, it was Budapest's first permanent bridge and is close to our mooring spot.

I am intrigued by the excursion to the Hospital in the Rock, one of Budapest's lesser-known attractions. Hewn into caves beneath Castle Hill, the subterranean hospital was used during the Siege of Budapest near the end of the Second World War, in January and February 1945,

and in the 1956 revolution, a revolt against Soviet rule. Wards and rooms containing original equipment are brought to life by rather creepy waxwork figures, but it's fascinating.

The next day we arrive in Vienna, with a visit to the world-renowned Spanish Riding School that's celebrating its 450th anniversary this year. Although it's tricky to time visits to coincide with one of the gala performances, the morning exercise sessions in the ornate Winter Riding School are open to the public and there are guided stable tours. I'm in equine heaven watching the Lipizzaner stallions practising dressage movements, which have their roots in military combat, against a backdrop of classical music. But you don't necessarily need to be a horse lover to appreciate the skill of the riders, including women who were admitted to the school for the first time in 2008, and their magnificent mounts, which are born jet black and then gradually turn white.

Afterwards there's free time, and some of us go in search of a





Clockwise from above:
The grandeur of Salzburg from the Salzach river; the arresting Hundertwasser haus, Vienna; a Viennese street

traditional Viennese coffee house. We are duly rewarded at Gerstner, where a tempting array of cakes, pastries and tarts line the display cabinets. A huge piece of apple strudel with cream arrives at the table and I delude myself that I might shed a few of the calories during Harald and Katharina's imminent dance class.

From Vienna we sail through the spectacular scenery of the UNESCO-listed Wachau valley, lined with vineyards. There's a visit to the vast 18th century Benedictine abbey perched high on rocky outcrop at Melk. It resembles a palace with an imperial corridor covered with portraits of Austrian rulers, a library containing 90,000 books and stunning frescoes. The high spot of the day, in every sense, comes with a 'sundowner'

excursion. We're driven to the ruins of medieval Dürnstein Castle to toast the end of the day, with drinks provided by Scenic and a panoramic view over the river.

The following morning some passengers take a trip to the medieval Czech town of Cesky Krumlov or journey to Salzburg to explore the birthplace of Mozart. I opt for a quiet day on *Scenic Jasper*, relaxing in the surroundings of its contemporary cream, black and mirrored décor peppered with modern art. After the indulgence in Vienna, I skip lunch in the restaurant and go for the light and mainly vegetarian options in the River Café in the main lounge.

It's probably just as well as our next stop is across the border in Bavaria at Regensburg, celebrated for its pork sausages, served with sweet mustard and dark ale brewed by monks at nearby Weltenburg Abbey. Close to the town's landmark 12th-century 16-arch bridge is the world's oldest 'sausage kitchen', an unassuming building first opened to satisfy the hunger of workmen building the stone bridge.

Back at the ship we head towards Nuremberg and it's almost time to say farewell. I might not have got into the swing of the Viennese waltz, but the cruise has been a whirl of wonderful sights and experiences. 



GETTING THERE

An eight-day *Gems of the Danube* cruise, sailing between Budapest and Nuremberg, costs from £1,895pp, based on two sharing, with flights and transfers. The price includes all meals, wine, beer and soft drinks throughout the day, excursions, butler service and gratuities. For more information or to book go to scenic.co.uk/0808 102 0202.

Go online: See cruise-international.com/scenic-jasper-river-cruise-ship-review/



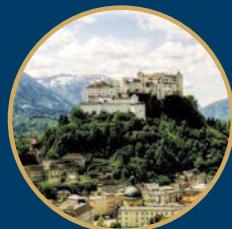
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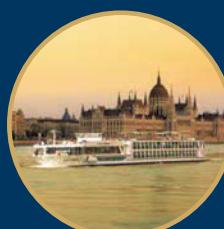
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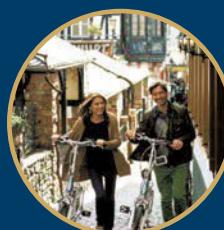
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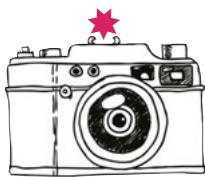
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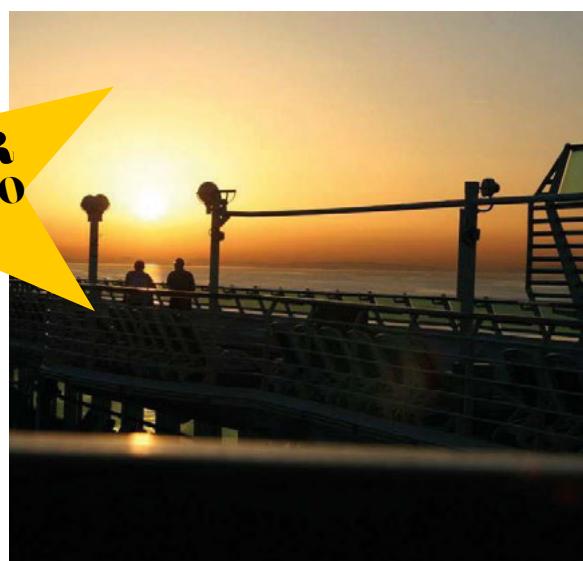
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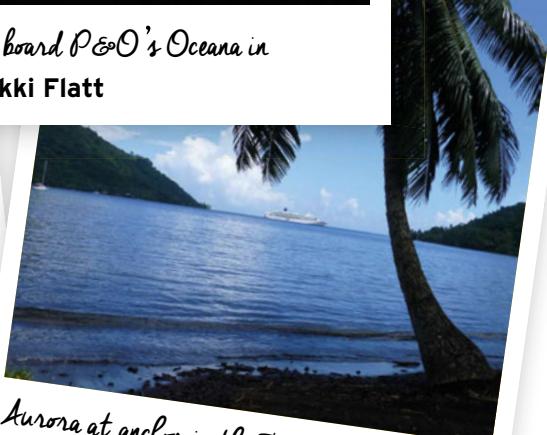
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favourite photos from your cruise



Fabulous sunset on board P&O's Oceana in
Western Europe. **Vikki Flatt**



Beautiful plaza in Cadiz from our Spanish
cruise on Viking Star. **Sasha Mills**



Aurora at anchor in the French Polynesian
island of Moorea. **Adrian Seward**

In our next issue...



- THE BEST BALTIC CRUISES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD
- CRUISING FROM CHINA ON QUANTUM OF THE SEAS
- FAB CHRISTMAS MARKETS TRIPS
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THIS ISSUE'S EXPERTS



Julie Peasgood is a TV presenter, travel expert and Contributing Editor for *Cruise International*



Liz Jarvis is a well-known travel expert and the Editor of *Cruise International*



Sara Macefield is an award-winning journalist and Contributing Editor for *Cruise International*



Q I'm looking for a special mini-cruise to celebrate an anniversary, are there any you would recommend?

A. A mini-cruise is an ideal way to celebrate a special occasion and all the major cruise lines offer mini-cruises, ranging from one to six nights. Fred. Olsen has departures from the UK to the Channel Islands, Spain, Belgium, Norway and France (where a particular favourite destination is Honfleur). P&O Cruises departs regularly from the UK to Western Europe, with adults-only sailings to Guernsey and Zeebrugge (for Bruges) or Antwerp and Amsterdam. Cunard Line is currently offering an enticing two-night city cruise from Southampton to Hamburg, and Cruise and Maritime has a popular two-night cruise to Dublin. Along with

Thomson, it also offers overnight 'party cruises' (these are mostly one-way sailings between UK ports). And luxury cruise line Hebridean Cruises features four-night cruises to the *Lochs of Argyll* and *Islands of the Clyde*, while Royal Caribbean offers two, three or four-night cruises to Paris. If you want to travel further afield, Carnival, Celebrity and Norwegian Cruise Lines have sailings from New York to Bermuda, or from Florida to the Bahamas. Mini-cruises often represent great value and are excellent for short escapes, or for first-timers who want to test the water without committing to a full cruise. **Julie Peasgood**

Q We would love to take a cruise in Egypt – but is it safe?

A. Egypt has suffered in recent years from unrest and terrorism that badly hit its Nile cruising business, but over the last year the market has started to recover and one of the biggest names to return is Uniworld, which plans to restart sailings from September. Other companies offering Nile cruises include Discover Egypt, Saga, Kuoni and Titan. The threat of terrorist incidents

remains high, the most recent in June at Luxor, so it is always advisable to check the Foreign Office travel advice at fco.gov.uk before booking. Generally speaking, tourist areas along the Nile, including Qinā, Aswan, Abu Simbel and the Valley of the Kings, are deemed as safe for travel but this could change at any time. **Sara Macefield**



Q We want to take our two teenagers on a cruise but they're at the age where they think everything's boring. Would you recommend it?

A. Absolutely. If you choose a state-of-the-art ship – for example, Royal Caribbean's *Anthem of the Seas* with its skydiving and bumper cars – they'll never run out of things to do. Go for a cruise line with great kids' clubs for teenagers – as well

as Royal Caribbean, MSC, Disney, Norwegian, Celebrity and Carnival all cater for teens really well – and they'll also make new friends. Choose a Baltic, Eastern Med or Caribbean itinerary and I guarantee you'll all have a fabulous holiday. **Liz Jarvis**



THE INSIDER



Our regular column from **Andy Harmer**, Director of the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) UK & Ireland

Although I knew a major announcement from the Carnival Corporation was in the offing, I must admit to being surprised and quite excited when I heard about the new travel experience being introduced by the company – 'social impact travel'. The company's new cruise line, 'Fathom', is targeted at a cross section of people wanting to have a positive impact on people's lives. On Fathom, guests can spend some of their time on 'voluntourism' projects – giving back to those local communities where the ship visits.

This move by Carnival certainly demonstrates that cruise lines are constantly looking at how guests can create their perfect holiday experience – whatever that may be.

Indeed, at a recent CLIA event we were fortunate enough to welcome famous TV wildlife expert Nigel Marven on stage, where he captivated the audience with his amazing wildlife experiences. And these encounters were, in fact, captured while filming the series *Cruise Ship Adventures* and were experienced by not only himself, but by passengers and crew.

Nigel travelled with Azamara Club Cruises to some of the world's most iconic cruise adventure destinations such as Svalbard close to the Arctic Circle and Antarctica – and in both Nigel came across a wide variety of wildlife showing just how amazing these destinations can be.

Perhaps more surprisingly, Nigel said he was also able to discover some weird and wonderful animals and wildlife experiences in places that perhaps we would not expect, such as the Mediterranean and Caribbean.

But that is one of the joys of taking a cruise – that at each of the ports of call, and indeed whilst on board, every single guest can create their 'own holiday experience'. This can vary a lot, ranging from great off-the-beaten-track adventures to cultural expeditions, and from the many family activities, to days of complete relaxation.

Let me give you an example. Many of my friends choose to cruise because of the dining opportunities available on cruise ships; that chance to enjoy great food in a variety of settings with a wide choice of menus. And they love to mix that up with the great dining choices in the various destinations. After all, what's better than having a different lunch experience almost every day?

More recently my friends have turned to the growing number of cruise lines that offer culinary schools – using their holiday to improve their cooking skills whilst at the same time enjoying fantastic cuisine.

This is how they like to create their 'own holiday' – and cruising is sufficiently flexible and varied to bring something special to everyone. ■

My favourite cities in the world include San Francisco, Sydney and New York. When I was a child we went mainly to France, Spain and America on holiday. I've travelled to China and Hong Kong, and I would love to go to Vietnam one day.



Our last holiday was to Miami. We had a fabulous time. It was a wonderful family holiday where we had great adventures and amazing sightseeing opportunities. We particularly enjoyed Cape Canaveral, Nassau and visiting the crocodile swamps.



DARCEY Bussell

The Strictly judge and godmother to P&O's Azura tells us about her favourite places in the world



I always love returning to Sydney – Australia was my home for five years – and also to all the cities which have lots of cultural interest.

I think cruising is brilliant, particularly for families. Everything is at your fingertips, from entertainment to activities, from relaxing to sight-seeing excursions.



We went to Norway on Azura, which was incredible. We were able to reach the most inaccessible places and felt very privileged to have been there. Seeing the landscape and the formations from the sea gave totally different vistas than the ones one gets from being on the land.

My favourite holiday memory is spending Christmas with my family in America when I was a child. 



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